

FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION 1914–1945



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**TITLE PAGE Morocco, early 1930s:
posed group of 3e REI légionnaires
wearing white cap covers, M1920 khaki
wool uniforms and the regimental
double fourragère. (Courtesy John Neal)**

Dedication

This book is dedicated, with respectful affection, to the memories of two *ancien légionnaires*: to Adjudant-Chef Charles Milassin of the Automobile Mounted Company/4e REI, RMLE, and 2e REI, whose generosity made possible much of what I have written on the subject for nearly 20 years; and to George Fromm of the 22e RMVE, whose company at each Camerone is greatly missed.

Acknowledgements

In planning the colour plates we have drawn heavily on research published in *Uniformes* and *Militaria* magazines; and on the work of the Keeper of the Legion Uniform Museum at Puylobier, M. Raymond Guyader, published in the magazines *Uniformes* and *Képi Blanc* over many years, and recently in his book cited in the Bibliography. Author and artist wish to record their debt to this invaluable primary research. The author also wishes to thank Gerry Embleton, Ron Harris, John Neal, François Vauvillier, Rosemary Weekley, Jim Worden and John Robert Young for their assistance with illustrations.

Publisher's Note

Readers may wish to study this title in conjunction with the following Osprey publications:

Elite 6 *French Foreign Legion Paratroops*
MAA 286 *The French Army 1914-18*
MAA 300 *French Foreign Legion Infantry & Cavalry since 1945*
MAA 312 *The Algerian War 1954-62*
MAA 315 *The French Army 1939-45 (1)*
MAA 318 *The French Army 1939-45 (2)*
MAA 322 *The French Indochina War 1946-54*
CAM 3 *France 1940*

Author's note

Consistency in spelling Arabic place names is not claimed; I have generally followed French transliteration, but different sources vary – e.g. Djebel Sagho or Sahrro. The same is true of tribal names: French accounts spell the Berber tribe of the far eastern High Atlas as Ait Tserrouchen, more recent sources as Ait Seghrushin. French units and ranks are capitalised in the English style.

As standard histories (see Bibliography) cover the campaigns of Legion units in the World Wars, I have limited some passages here to note form in order to save space for material less accessible elsewhere to English-speaking readers – e.g. some of the Legion's Moroccan battles, and full commentaries on the uniform plates.

Artist's Note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the publisher. All enquiries should be addressed to:

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FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION 1914-1945

THE LEGION IN 1914



Legionnaire, 2e Étranger, Algeria, 1912. Enlisted for five-year terms, he was paid 5 centimes a day (roughly 4 per cent the pay of a contemporary British Army regular). He could march in full pack and equipment a minimum of 24 km a day – every day for weeks, if necessary – under the North African sun, on two very basic daily meals. He was a well-trained marksman, but his fieldcraft was fairly rudimentary and initiative was not demanded. This old-fashioned heavy infantryman could be trusted to advance unhesitatingly into the assault in ranks unshaken by enemy fire and, in defence, to hold out to the last man and the last-but-one cartridge. An iron discipline was exercised by *HCs* and *adjudants* (warrant officers); in garrison officers were remote figures, but in battle men often risked their lives to bring in an officer's body under fire. The pre-war legionnaire's great vices were drunkenness, and often hare-brained attempts at desertion for which old soldiers might be punished fairly indulgently).

In 1914 the *Légion Étrangère* consisted of the six-battalion 1er and 2e Régiments Étrangers, with headquarters respectively at Sidi bel Abbès and Saïda, Algeria. The 4th Battalion of the 1er RE (IV/1er RE) and V/2e RE were in French Indochina. Each thousand-strong battalion consisted of four rifle companies, numbered consecutively (i.e. 1st–4th in I/1er RE, 5th–8th in II/1er RE, etc.); and at various dates one or two mule-borne Mounted Companies were also affiliated to each regiment, though operating detached.

Since before the turn of the century the French Army had been nibbling at the desolate and disputed southern frontier between France's colony of Algeria and independent, chaotic Morocco. This unofficial war of raid, reprisal and unauthorised encroachment, oasis by oasis, was choreographed for the French by the visionary Col. Lyautey, commanding the Ain Sefra sector and later the Oran division.

Since 1907 open invasion from both the Atlantic coast and Algeria had extended France's military control of Morocco, nominally in support of the almost powerless Sultan. These major operations had led in March 1912 to the declaration of a formal French protectorate over Morocco under Gen. Lyautey as Resident-General. Tribal resistance redoubled; but by May 1914 more or less French-controlled corridors had been established in the north between Casablanca, Fez, Taza, Oujda and the Algerian frontier, and a number of strategic posts had been planted in the far from pacified south. The outbreak of World War I found two Régiments de Marche ('marching regiments', temporary task forces) in Morocco, drawn from the 1er RE (I/, II/ & VI/, plus two Mounted Companies) and 2e RE (III/ & VI/, plus one Mounted Company).

Mobilisation in France brought a tide of idealistic foreign volunteers clamouring to enlist under the tricolour. It was decided to allow them to sign up for the duration of hostilities, but only in the Foreign Legion. They would form second Marching Regiments of the 1er and 2e REs in Metropolitan France, each of four lettered battalions; a backbone would be provided by veterans – excluding Germans, Austrians, Turks, etc. – from the North African battalions. The 2e RM/1er RE and 2e RM/2e RE were formed on 50 per cent veteran cadres and trained at Mailly-le-Camp in September–October 1914.

In the event the numbers of volunteers led to the raising at Reuilly, Paris, of a three-battalion 3e RM/1er RE largely from Belgians, Italians, Greeks and Russians; it had few veterans, and the cadre was drawn from the Gendarmerie and the Paris fire brigade. Simultaneously the three-battalion 4e RM/1er RE (almost entirely Italian) was formed at Nîmes and Montelimar.



Légionnaires of the RMLE in the trenches, probably in summer 1916 before the Somme offensive.

Enthusiastic foreign volunteers are good for national morale, but in practical terms they can be a nuisance. Few of these idealists had a military background; their enthusiasm was generous but their expectations unrealistic. To educated political liberals the brutal realities of old-fashioned military life came as a shock. The Legion had a grim reputation – fostered by pre-war German propaganda – as brutalised colonial mercenaries recruited from the scum of Europe, and many

volunteers resented being compelled to join their ranks.

The volunteers' integration was hampered by the French Army's shortage of suitably experienced cadres. The men posted to lead these volatile multinational units were often unequal to the challenge they posed, being ageing Territorials or reservists of rigid outlook. Under the special circumstances of 1914 (including the obvious problem of language) large groups of single nationalities were allowed to serve together – a mistake which the Legion had avoided since the 1830s. This soon caused tensions between companies, and encouraged national groups to make concerted demands for special treatment.

As damaging was the gulf between the new volunteers and the North African veterans. These rock-hard old drunkards regarded the duration-only volunteers as whining civilians unworthy of the proud status of légionnaires which they themselves had earned through hard years in Morocco; the volunteers resented and feared the African veterans as uncomradely brutes. Exposure to the new realities of warfare would weld the survivors together soon enough.

THE WESTERN FRONT 1914–18

More detailed battle histories will be found in *La Livre d'Or* and particularly in Garros (see bibliography); the following notes are a basic summary only:

2e RM/1er RE November 1914, four battalions posted to Prunay sector, Champagne. May 1915, committed to Artois offensive with Moroccan Division near Neuville-Saint-Vaast; objectives were Ouvrages Blancs and Hill 140 on Vimy Ridge. Assault launched 9 May. Led by special team with grenades, wire-cutters, signal flags and white cloth pack-covers visible to artillery observers, regiment advanced 3,000 yards across open ground under heavy fire. Casualties 1,900-plus out of 4,000 all ranks; objectives taken, but lost to counter-attack. 16–17 June 1915, two surviving battalions attacked Hill 119 near Souchez; objective taken, but lost to counter-attack; 650 casualties.

July 1915, Moroccan Div. rested in the Vosges; 2e RM received 897 reinforcements from disbanded 3e RM/1er RE. September, returned to Champagne. 28 September, attack near Navarin Farm; enemy wire intact, 627 all ranks lost for no gain. October, out of line in winter quarters.

3e RM/1er RE Posted to Somme front December 1914, into line near Frise. Generally malcontent unit, reduced to two battalions March 1915 by transfers to own national armies. July 1915, disbanded and useful remainder posted to 2e RM/1er RE.

4e RM/1er RE Garibaldi Brigade – bore that title and the Savoy star on colours. Posted to Argonne, December 1914; fought at Maison-Forestière, Bollante Woods on Christmas night, and at Courtes-Chausses and Four-de-Paris 5 January 1915, supporting 10th Colonial Div.; total dead c.430. 5 March 1915, disbanded at Italy's request, most survivors joining Italian Army.

2e RM/2e RE Four battalions at front before Craonne mid-December 1914 with 36th Div.; moved May 1915 to Rheims, held various sectors. July, rested in the Vosges; one battalion disbanded and Russians, Belgians and Italians transferred to national armies; regiment joined 2e RM/1er RE in Moroccan Div., Champagne.

25 September 1915, temporarily attached to 10th Colonial Div., assaulted Wagram and Presbourg defences north of Navarin Farm; took several trench systems and many prisoners; when neighbouring Metropolitan unit fell back 2e RM restored line; 320 casualties.

In October 1915 the Moroccan Division was pulled out of the line, and it was decided, in view of the casualties – and the shortage of recruits as more countries joined the war – to merge all survivors into a single three-battalion Régiment de Marche de la Légion Étrangère (RMLE). Initially commanded by Lt. Col. Cot, with 71 officers and 3,115 men, the RMLE came into being on 11 November 1915.

The RMLE 1915-18

On 4 July 1916 during the Anglo-French Somme offensive the RMLE, attached to 3rd Colonial Div., attacked the fortified village of Belloy-en-Santerre. Advancing in the rain over open fields of long grass, under heavy enfilade machine gun fire, the légionnaires took the village (and 750 prisoners) and held it until relieved on the night of the 5th-6th; casualties, 25 officers and 844 men. They went in again at Chancelier on 8-9 July, suffering another 400 casualties but making no progress.

After a brief rest the regiment went back into the trenches, holding several sectors throughout winter 1916-17; command passed to Lt. Col. Duriez. In March 1917 the Germans pulled back from a huge salient between Arras and Soissons, and Gen. Nivelle's much-vaunted April offensive fell on their newly prepared Siegfried Line defences.

At dawn on 17 April the RMLE attacked the ruins of Auberive in the Suijpes Valley during the so-called battle of Moronvilliers, on the right



Adjutant-Chef Mader, Lt. Col. Rollet, and RMLE colour party at Bois-l'Évêque, 27 September 1917 – probably the most famous Legion photograph of all. The colour was decorated with the Légion d'Honneur after the RMLE's sixth citation; personal awards were also made to these other three soldiers, Corporals Rocas, Dieta and Leva. Rollet – one of whose eccentricities was always to wear his pale khaki African uniform – would command the 3e REI until 1926 and the 1er REI until 1931, when he was promoted brigadier-general and became the Legion's first Inspector. His tireless efforts on behalf of his corps earned him the undisputed title 'Father of the Legion'.

flank of the Chemin des Dames offensive. The terrible lessons of 1914–16 had been learned to some extent, and assaults were now a good deal more sophisticated. Artillery preparation was far more thorough; each battalion had its own machine gun company; each platoon had its own man-portable light machine gun; the men were trained in effective minor tactics to co-ordinate the fire and movement of mutually supporting machine gun teams, rifle- and hand-grenade squads and riflemen; and assaults tried to infiltrate companies between stubborn positions rather than attempting a single-wave advance. Despite all this, the Nivelles offensive was a disaster for most of the divisions committed.

After three days of clawing their way from shellhole to shellhole in deep mud the légionnaires took the main enemy trench line at Auberive, though fighting continued until the 22nd; the regiment used more than 50,000 grenades in these five days. The legendary Adjutant-Chef Mader, of German birth, won the Légion d'Honneur for driving back most of a company of Saxon infantry and taking a battery of six guns, at the head of just ten légionnaires.

After recuperation at Mailly during May command passed to Lt. Col. Paul Rollet, a veteran of the desert Mounted Companies. These were the months when 54 French divisions were shaken by mutinies among men driven beyond the limits of endurance; many units declared themselves willing to defend their lines to the end, but not to attack, and it took time for the newly appointed Gen. Pétain to lead them back to their duty. Yet the foreigners of the RMLE were rock-steady, and on 14 July Rollet led an honour guard to Paris for the RMLE colour to be decorated – uniquely at that date – with the Médaille Militaire (see commentary to Plate C3).

On 20–21 August, at Cumières on the Verdun front, the RMLE advanced far ahead of schedule, resisted counter-attacks and heavy air strafing, and then exploited their success at short notice at Hill 265. They held until relieved on 4 September, taking 680 prisoners and 14 guns at the relatively light cost of 53 dead and 271 wounded. Gen. Pétain reviewed the unit while it rested near Vaucouleurs on 27 September. He told the RMLE that for this sixth citation he had had to invent a new decoration for them – the red lanyard of the Légion d'Honneur – but that he was quite happy to go on inventing rewards as long as they kept on fighting as they had at Cumières.

From October 1917 to January 1918 the unit was in trenches in the Flirey sector, making another successful attack on 8 January; on the 12th, heavily bombarded with gas shells, the regimental HQ and two companies ignored orders to withdraw. The RMLE was resting at the end of March 1918 when the last great German offensive punched the Allies backwards, and the unit was rushed north to the Amiens sector of the reeling British front.

They attacked the flank of the enemy push at Hangard Wood on 26 April, advancing through fog into a shell-churned chaos swept by the machine guns of the German 19th Division. The battalions were



World War I saw numbers of foreign volunteers granted commissions in the Legion. Lt. Col. Albert de Tscharnier, a Bernese officer in the Swiss Army, joined the RMLE as a captain in 1916, taking the first of his seven wounds at Belloy-en-Santerre. He served in Morocco with the 3e REI, commanding the II/3e for seven years from June 1925. In this period several *chefs de bataillon* stamped their strong personalities on their battalions like old-fashioned regimental proprietors; the units led by these charismatic *caïds* became widely known as e.g. 'Bataillon de Tscharnier', 'Nicolas' or 'Maire' rather than by their numbers.

RIGHT Legion cavalry in Morocco; captioned elsewhere as dating from 1925, this photo would in that case show III/1er REC in the Tache de Taza.



The Legion always spent as much time in back-breaking labour as in fighting, and it was légionnaires who built many of North Africa's roads. One of this scruffy gang wears a striped undershirt issued from French naval stores at Oran.

committed one after another, each pushing forward as its predecessor was pinned down; British tanks came up in support, but the fire was too heavy for infantry to follow them. The battle lasted until the 28th; the RMLE held the retaken ground under heavy shelling and five counter-attacks, at a cost of some 850 casualties; the 1/RMLE was reduced to one officer and 187 men.

In late May the Moroccan Div. was rushed to head off a threat south-west of Soissons; on 30–31 May the Legion suffered 400 casualties while holding the Montagne de Paris ridge against repeated attacks. Reduced to 1,200 effectives, the RMLE was shifted into the path of several other enemy initiatives in early June, notably at Saint-Bardry. Their operations between 25 April and 12 June cost the RMLE a total of 1,250 casualties.



Under a raging storm on the night of 18 July the RMLE advanced on the Dommiers plateau south of Soissons, with no preliminary bombardment to alert the enemy. Supported by Renault tanks and the strafing of the 104e Escadrille de Chasse, the Legion reached the Soissons–Château Thierry road on 20 July. The butcher's bill was another 780 all ranks.

The RMLE's final operation was an attack on the Hindenburg Line near Laffaux on 2 September 1918. The regiment gained all their objectives, finally taking Allemant (and a battalion of the Prussian 43rd Regiment) on 15 September. They were relieved



Rare Morocco action photos: the Mounted Company, 2e REI in September 1932 near Tazigzaoust in the High Atlas during the advance on the Plateau des Lacs. They carry M1892/16 carbines and wear M1901 Colonial khaki drill (see Plate C2). Képi covers, issued a creamy unbleached shade, were ordered dyed pale khaki for active service; but memoirs suggest that for reasons of *esprit de corps* most légionnaires sported the forbidden white-bleached covers. In c.1928–30 there was even a vogue in e.g. the 4e REI and 1er REC for adding a cut-out red grenade to the cover. (Courtesy Jim Worden)

that night after 13 days and nights of virtually continuous fighting; they had gone into battle with 2,563 all ranks, and came out with 1,130. The Armistice on the third anniversary of the regiment's formation found the légionnaires in a quiet sector near Champenoux.

Legion records show that 42,883 men served on the Western Front in the Marching Regiments of the 1er and 2e RE and the RMLE – 6,239 Frenchmen and 36,644 foreigners. Of these 5,172 were listed killed in action, and about 25,000 wounded or missing (many of the latter undoubtedly being fatalities); casualties were thus around 70 per cent of the total who served. In November 1918 the RMLE was the second most decorated regiment in the French Army.

The Dardanelles, Serbia & Russia, 1915–19

In February 1915 the 1er Régiment de Marche d'Afrique was formed from two battalions of Zouaves and one of légionnaires – the III/RMA (Lt. Col. Niéger) – with two companies each from the 1er and 2e RE. Taking part with the French 156th Div. in the Allied landings around Gallipoli, the unit landed at Sedd ul Bahr on 27 April. During the next nine months the Allies suffered very high casualties while penned almost immobile within their small, rocky beachheads. Bloody fighting in the ravine of Kereves Dere reduced the III/RMA by June to about 100 enlisted men led by Adjudant-Chef Léon. By August, when 700 reinforcements finally arrived from Indochina, the battalion had almost ceased to exist and many men in the line were recently treated wounded.

The 156th Div. was transferred to Salonika in October 1915 to fight the Bulgarians in Serbia, and the RMA endured a wretched winter retreat. In autumn 1916 the dwindling battalion fought at Monastir, and in spring 1917 at Trana Stena. With only some 200 effectives left the III/RMA was disbanded in October 1917, most survivors eventually joining the RMLE.

As part of the Allied intervention forces during the Russian Civil War a battalion nominally affiliated to the 1er RE was recruited locally

around Archangel in autumn 1918; a small Legion cadre from France was eventually commanded by Cdt. Monod. One machine gun and three rifle companies went into the line gradually between October 1918 and July 1919. The Allies evacuated in October 1919, the local personnel passing into various White Russian units complete with their French uniforms and equipment.

COLONIAL CAMPAIGNS 1914-1939

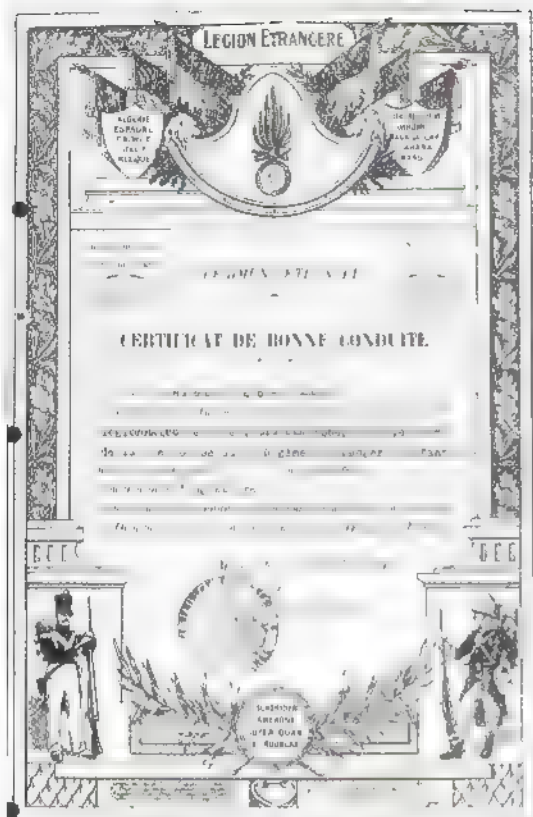
Morocco 1914-1919

In August 1914 Gen. Lyautey, stripped of most of his troops, was ordered to withdraw the rest into safe coastal enclaves. Determined to preserve what had taken so long to win, he pursued instead an exhausting four-year campaign with the resources left to him. Some 20 battalions – légionnaires, criminals of the Bataillons d'Infanterie Légère d'Afrique, Tirailleurs Sénégalais, French Territorial reservists – and local irregular *goumiers* struggled to hold and supply the remote posts planted among hostile tribes all over this vast country. While the world's attention was fixed on the Western Front a dwindling force of mainly German and Austrian légionnaires fought many desperate, forgotten actions.

A purely defensive posture would have been fatal; mobile columns had to circulate through the wild mountain terrain of the Middle Atlas in northern and central Morocco, while Mounted Companies patrolled

This alpine terrain gives an idea why such high casualties were suffered when advancing against the determined Berber riflemen of the Moroccan highlands. The soldier on the rock parapet at near right is Légionnaire Bobby Lincoln, who brought these photos back. (Courtesy Jim Worden)





Bobby Lincoln's honourable discharge certificate, issued at Meknès on 8 September 1935 after five years service, and signed by Lt. Col. Imhaus, 2e REI. (Courtesy Jim Worden)

the foothills and plains around the huge, largely unpacified oasis complex of the Tafilalt in the southern desert. The strategic northern corridor from headquarters at Fez eastward to Taza (in the centre of the so-called Tache de Taza, a notoriously hostile mountain region), and beyond to Algeria, had to be cleared time and again. A subtle and elusive leader named Abd el Malek Meheddin was constantly stirring up the northern tribes. The dissidents were armed by German agents, and free to come and go from safe refuges in the Atlas ranges, over the border in Spanish Morocco and in the Tafilalt.

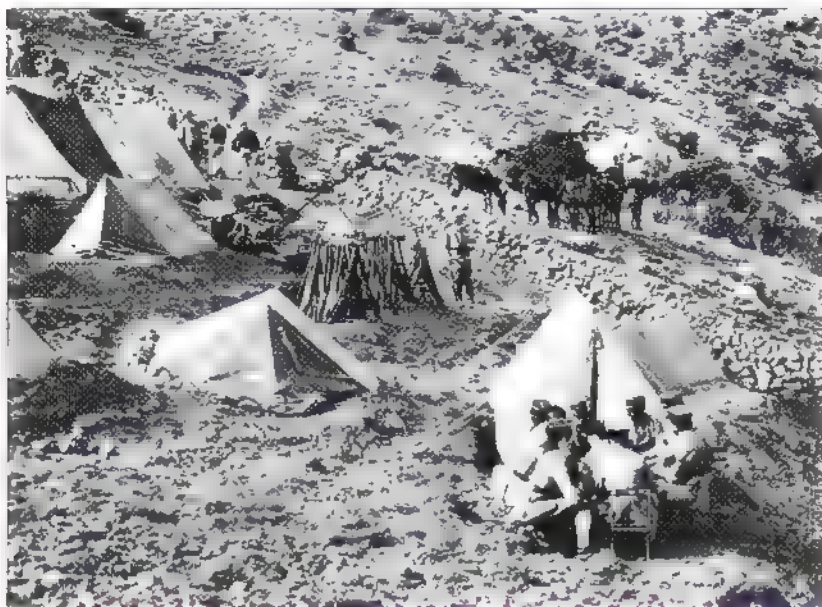
These actions were not always on a small scale. On 13 November 1914, at El Herri in the Middle Atlas, Zaia warriors wiped out a French column from Khenifra killing 33 officers and 600 men. The VI/2e RE marched with the relief column sent from Mami to Khenifra and fought at El Hammam and on the Oum er R'bia; in the immediate aftermath all three 1er RE battalions had to be committed against tribes attacking the Taza corridor from the south.

Of the units initially available (see above, The Legion in 1914) the VI/2e RE would be broken up late in the war to reinforce the others. A Mixed Battalion from Algeria was posted to Bou Denib when unrest broke out on the desert frontier in

early 1916, consisting of two companies each of légionnaires and 'Joyeux' from the *Bataillons d'Afrique*; this too was disbanded in 1919. Starved of replacements, the Legion in Morocco was down to an effective total strength of about six companies by the end of World War I.

Although all these overstretched units saw hard marching and fighting (particularly during the four-year running battle to fight convoys through to Khenifra, which involved all the northern battalions in turn), the independent Mounted Companies perhaps demand special mention. With one mule to every two men, rider and marcher changing places every hour, they could cover 50km, occasionally up to 70km, in 24 hours. This valuable mobility condemned them to the most exhausting operations in the Taza corridor, the Atlas and the southern desert. They spearheaded mobile columns, seizing the crests on either flank; escorted vulnerable convoys; and force-marched to the rescue of desperate garrisons, in choking summer heat and icy winter rain and mud.

For space reasons a single engagement must serve to suggest the flavour of these missions: that fought by the 2e Compagnie Montée/1er RE on 9 August 1918 at Gaouz, a village between the Oued Rheris and Oued Ziz in the Tafilalt. A war party – probably of Ait Khabbash Berbers – had been intercepted and put to flight at nearby Sefalat by a mixed column. This was divided in two to give chase; Cdt. Pochelu led a mixed Tunisian/Senegalese Tirailleur battalion and the 2e CM/1er RE (Capt. Timm) into the palm groves of Gaouz – a large, thickly grown plantation whose trees shadowed vegetable gardens divided by a maze of irrigation ditches and mud walls.



Legion marching camp in Morocco. The officers sit at mess; between the piled arms and the grazing mules at right, note the drystone parapet. The Legion always built these *muralles d'Afrique* around night encampments when on active service.



A légionnaire (note tunic of darker khaki drill shade than loose-cut trousers) hands a spit of sizzling meat over a parapet to his officers; 3e REI, Morocco, early 1930s. (Courtesy John Neal)

Heavy firing greeted the *Tirailleurs*; many fell, and the Legion came up in support between the Tunisian and Senegalese companies. Firing ceased as the enemy fell back. The *Tirailleurs* advanced again, with the 2e CM behind them; but after about 30 minutes they ran into much heavier resistance. The Senegalese on the right recoiled; the 2e CM charged and re-established a line. The Berbers attacked again, infiltrating the Senegalese; another Legion bayonet charge drove them back. The Tunisians were pinned down by enemy fire; and under

further pressure the Senegalese suddenly broke.

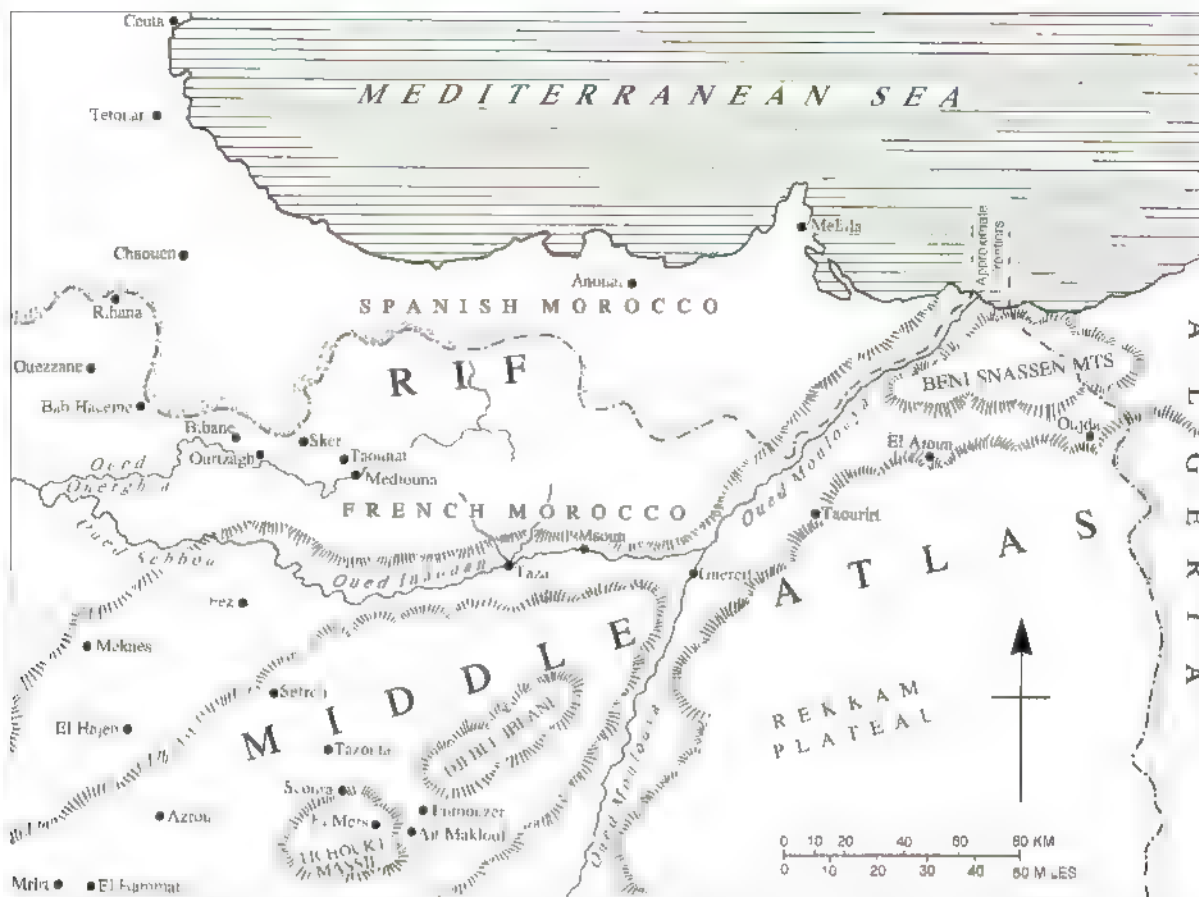
The 2e CM's automatic weapons had all jammed (suggesting the M1915 Chauchat LMG rather than the reliable M1914 Hotchkiss), and the last ten rifle grenades were fired. The enemy now infiltrated the Tunisians on the left, who also fell back; the légionnaires made a third bayonet charge while the Senegalese were rallied behind them. At about 3 p.m. a bullet broke Capt. Timm's left arm. Lt. Jorel took over, only to fall in his turn; Berbers swarmed forward to finish him off with knives. Sous-lt. Freycon grabbed a carbine and defended himself like a tiger until he too was killed by a bullet in the head.

Senegalese, Tunisians and Berber warriors became mixed together in chaotic hand-to-hand fighting. Only the Mounted Company held together under the leadership of Adjutant-Chef Roqueplan and of the badly wounded Capt. Timm, who had himself tied into the saddle of a mule. A second bullet struck him in the face, but he remained conscious and controlled a disciplined retreat around which the surviving *Tirailleurs* rallied. The Berbers, eager to loot the dead, stopped once they reached the edge of the palm trees. A sandstorm blew up at around 5 p.m., covering the painful four-hour retreat to Tighmart post. Legion losses were two officers and 50 NCOs and men dead, with seven surviving wounded (the *Tirailleurs* lost a hundred).

On 19 September the company was recalled to Taza, being replaced at Bou Denib by the 1ère CM/1er RE. The chieftain who had mauled them paid for it on 15 January 1919 at Meski, at the hands of the Mixed Battalion from Bou Denib.

Morocco 1919–1924

Although the Armistice brought a flood of enlistments the Legion in Morocco faced a difficult period, largely due to the shortage of NCOs and officers with solid experience of colonial soldiering, and the very different type of recruit compared with the tough but obedient pre-war volunteers.



While beginning the painful task of re-establishing control in northern Morocco the corps was completely reorganised. The 1er REI became the 1er REI - 'Regiment of Foreign Infantry' - and while fielding individual battalions it fulfilled central depot functions at Sidi bel Abbès. The 2e REI moved from Saida to Morocco with three battalions. A single battalion of the RMLE shipped back to Morocco became the basis for a new 3e REI in November 1919, taking over the two Mounted Companies in the north. The battalions of the old 1er and 2e still in Morocco and the Mounted Company at Bou Denib formed the 4e REI in November 1920; the IV/ and V/4e were raised later.

During the spring/summer campaigning seasons all-arms Mobile Groups would drive new roads into the Tache de Taza and the Middle Atlas, encircling, containing and fighting their way into the tribal heartlands of the dissidents. As the roads crept into the mountains, posts had to be built to guard them. In winter the posts had to be garrisoned by dispersed companies, and this fragile infrastructure had to be kept supplied. Tribes that submitted had to be protected, and raiders pursued and punished. Dozens of ugly little battles were fought; again, space allows only a representative example.

On 6 May 1922, during Mobile Group operations south of Taza, Cdt. Nicolas with 300 men of his III/3e REI was ordered to occupy the rocky plateau of Tadout south-east of Scoura. When scouting *goumiers*

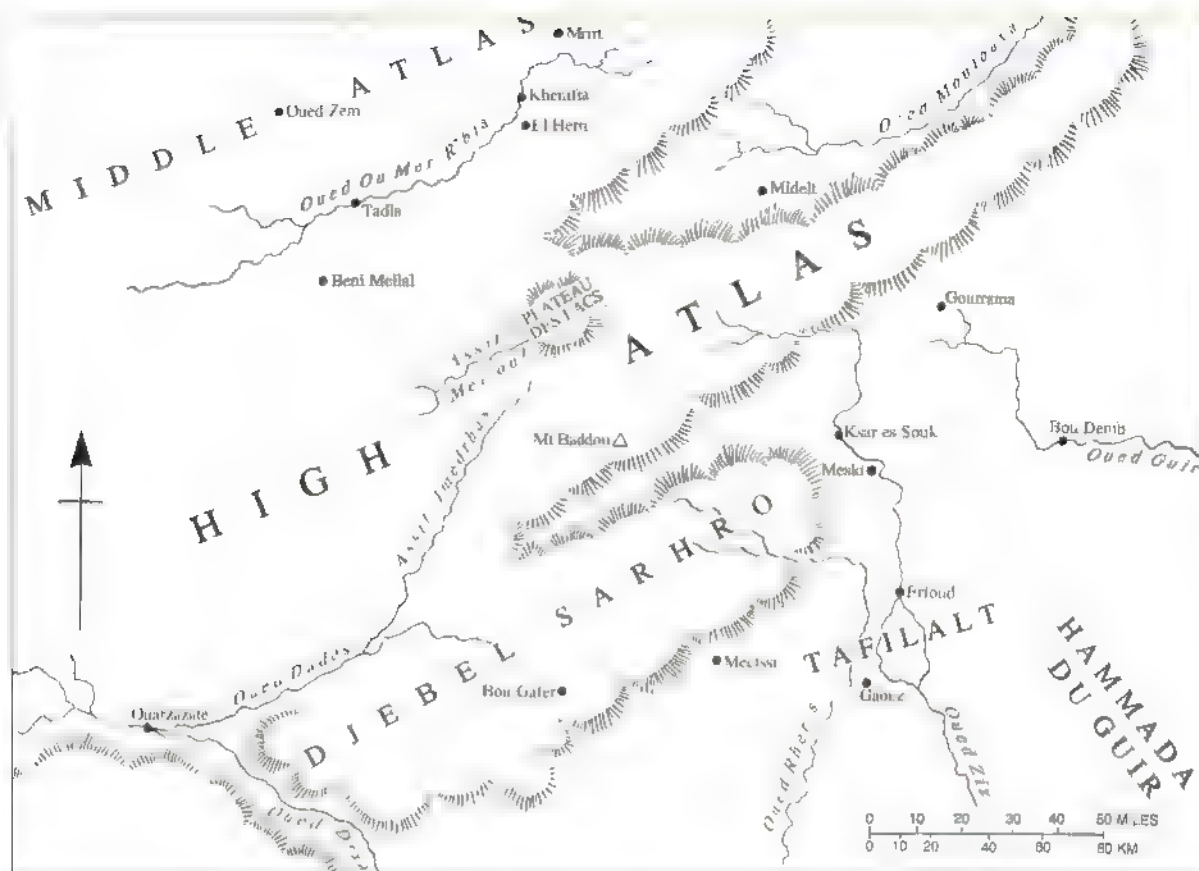
Sketch map of part of northern and eastern Morocco; only major features are named, to locate sites of some mentioned Legion actions. Frontiers, river courses, and limits of mountain ranges are approximate only. Northern Morocco's valleys are often extremely lush and the Atlas ranges well wooded; even in the southern desert fringe the major watercourses - e.g. the Qued Draa, Rheris, Ziz and Guir - are lined with many dense palm oases. However, much of the fighting in the 1920s-30s took place in the more arid mountain refuges of the tribes, in extremes of summer and winter climate.

reported enemy approaching the légionnaires took cover amid scrub and rocks on a lightly wooded slope, and were soon attacked by 1,200–1,500 well-armed and shockingly determined Ait Seghrushin Berbers, who came quickly to hand-to-hand range with the 9e Cie. on the right flank. Ground was lost, but retaken with the bayonet. The Moroccans fell back only slightly, bringing the whole position under heavy and accurate fire which pinned the battalion down while they infiltrated through cover on each flank.

After several hours' vain wait for relief Nicolas was preparing for the dangerous manoeuvre of disengagement under fire when the 9e Cie. was suddenly outflanked and beaten back with heavy loss, including Capt. Duchier. The other two companies shuddered, and the HQ platoon's small counter-attack reserve was surrounded and nearly overrun before supporting fire from nearby artillery and machine guns bought them a little time. Nicolas extricated his small battalion successfully under relentless pressure; this battle of Scoura lasted 12 hours, and cost 36 dead and 64 wounded.

Hall a dozen Legion battalions took part in operations south of Taza in 1923 as Mobile Groups penetrated extremely difficult mountain terrain against stubborn resistance; aircraft, armoured cars and artillery were of limited use in this tortured landscape. A bare list of a few engagements may give the tempo. The II/3e REI (Cdt. Naegelin) distinguished itself clearing Beni bou Zert warriors holding the summit of Mt. Talrant on 5 May. The I/3e (Cdt. Barrière) saw hard fighting against the Ait Seghrushin at Bou Khamoudj on 9 June; and again, alongside the 2e REI's three battalions and Mounted Company, at El Mers on 24 June. On 26–27 June the VI/1er (Cdt. Kratzert) and II/3e clawed their way on to the plateau of Tadout, which had defied the Bataillon Nicolas the year before. The encampment of the I/2e REI (Cdt. Buschenschütz), supported by a platoon of the CM, held off a heavy attack at Ait Maklouf on 17 July. The I/3e (Cdt. Susini) and III/2e REI (Cdt. Jenoudet) headed two columns attacking the Marmoucha tribal stronghold on the Immoizer plateau on 23 July, the latter losing 25 dead and 49 wounded. On 11 August the II/2e REI (Cdt. Janson) lost 22 dead and 51 wounded on the Djebel Iblane; nearby the III/2e was heavily counter-attacked at close range and lost 12 killed and 18 wounded. One of the latter was Cdt. Jenoudet, replaced by Cdt. Maire; the II/2e remained to establish new posts on the Djebel Iblane, and the Groupes Mobiles moved on. By the end of 1923 the whole Tichoukt massif was surrounded with new posts; but the season had cost the French Army at least 100 officers and 3,000 men dead.

A lull in major operations followed in 1924; but the légionnaires scattered in dozens of small and utterly desolate posts could never relax. Few were substantial forts; most were little more than glorified *sangars* of piled rocks, gravel-filled oil drums and a little barbed wire. They had to be built high, for good fields of fire; that meant the little garrisons had to send out regular water and firewood parties. The small posts needed frequent resupply by vulnerable convoys along snaking mountain tracks. Since the tribesmen were masters of concealed approach and ambush the French suffered a steady drain of casualties.



Morocco 1925-1935

A factor in Lyautey's calculations was always his porous northern frontier with the coastal strip of the Spanish Protectorate

All Berber tribesmen were dangerous enemies; those of the Rif Mountains were comparable in courage, fieldcraft and cruelty to the Pathans of the Indian/Alghan border. In July 1921 some 13,000 of Spain's neglected and ill-led garrison had been butchered between Melilla and Anoual by half that many lightly armed Rifis, led by a well-educated and far-sighted former Spanish colonial functionary, Abd el Krim of the Beni Urriaghel. His dazzling victory inspired a pan-tribal war of independence; and Abd el Krim turned his volatile coalition of clans into an army with some degree of formed units, ranks, paid officers and specialists and basic logistics. The booty of Anoual included 20,000 Mauser rifles, 400 Hotchkiss machine guns and more than 120 Schneider artillery pieces, and the Rifis hired European instructors (including, notoriously, the Legion deserter Josef Klemms).

Spain's political anarchy hampered her response; ground was won and lost, but the Rifis kept the initiative, and inflicted further huge casualties during the Spanish retreat from Chaouen in December 1924. Marshal Lyautey knew that the Rif rising would inevitably spill into French Morocco, but his appeals for reinforcements were ignored by Paris. The flashpoint was a French advance north of the Ouerghla River in May 1924, to install a line of posts garrisoned by Tirailleurs in the disputed grainlands of the Beni Zerwal.

ABOVE Sketch map of part of southern and eastern Morocco. The Legion's area of operations in the 1930s is too great to include at this scale: e.g., the V/1er REC base at Tata is off the map some 160km south-west of Ouarzazate. The Saharan base at Tindouf is perhaps 400km south-south-west of Ouarzazate and Tabelbala, patrol base of the CA/1er REI, is about 280km south of Bou Denib.

RIGHT *Compagnie Montée*, probably of the 3e REI, marching past in Morocco, early 1930s. Half the men march on foot, right, followed by the mounted officers and warrant officers and the mule-mounted half of the company. Under magnification the légionnaires can be seen to wear darkish khaki jackets and lighter baggy trousers gathered at the ankle, they carry M1892/16 carbines. (Courtesy John Neal)

Marc Volokhoff, a former Tsarist officer, may stand for the many foreigners who found new lives through the Legion.

Commissioned in the 3e RM/1er RE in December 1914, he fought in the Dardanelles and Serbia with the III/RMA and a Bosnian battalion from August 1915 to September 1916; in 1917 he qualified as a military pilot. Joining the RMLE in February 1918, he was badly wounded and won the knight's cross of the Légion d'Honneur while leading an MG platoon in the night attack on the Dommiers plateau on 18 July 1918. In 1923-25, while a lieutenant in first the 1er, then the 3e REI, he was on detached flying duty with the 37th Aviation Regt. in Morocco. A captain from March 1925, he flew throughout the Rif War, being wounded again and twice decorated; one citation mentions his gallantry in low-level bombing runs over Elbane on 13 May. Granted French citizenship, he retired in 1930 but was recalled in 1939 and sent to Bacarès to help form the 22e RMVE; the photo dates from that period. Dismissed early in 1941, he was arrested for Resistance activities in January 1943, but survived the war, and died aged 93 in 1979. (Courtesy Rosemary Weekley)



On 13 April 1925 some 8,000 Rifs launched concerted attacks on the French line; and the combination of intelligent leadership, great bravery, guerrilla skills and a degree of modern firepower proved devastating. Posts were cut off, heavily shelled or mortared, and then stormed with medieval ferocity; dozens of heroic last stands and ghastly massacres passed into French Army legend. Highly mobile, the separated Berber forces dismantled the French line in detail and flooded through the gaps. By 27 April some were only 20 miles from Fez, and 39 of 66 posts had been overrun or abandoned.

Most Legion units were tied down in the Tache de Taza, but some were rushed north to help stem the tide including the II/, VI/ and VII/1er REI, II/2e and III/3e. Again, a couple of examples must stand for all these actions.

The major post at Bibane changed hands four times during May at a total cost of more than 400 French dead. The fourth action was its recapture on 25 May by the II/1er (Cdt. Deslandes) and II/2e REI (Cdt. Goret). Successive assaults were pinned down by heavy fire; finally Cdt. Deslandes summoned his remaining seven officers, invited them to copy him in slinging on haversacks full of grenades, and led them and his men in an up-hill charge which took the objective Verdun-style. The cost that day was 103 dead and more than 300 wounded. On 5 June the Berbers retook Bibane yet again, and held it until finally bombed out that September. Deslandes was killed on 18 July at Bab Haccine near Ouezzan. In the same area the Mounted Company/4e REI was surrounded while covering the evacuation of Beni Roubert post. Cut off



in the middle of the enemy, the terribly wounded Légionnaire Siegel reared up and hurled his carbine over their heads to his comrades so that the Berbers should not take it from his corpse.

The diary of Cdt. Cazaban's VI/1er REI in May–June 1925 conveys the pressure on these units. Every action involved heavy fighting against enemies who had a proud tradition of marksmanship; who had added a good number of machine guns and grenades to their rifles and knives; who were eager to come to hand-to-hand; and who treated wounded and prisoners barbarously. On 4 May the battalion relieved Taounat post against the resistance of some 1,500 Berbers. On the 5th they covered the evacuation of Bab Soltane; on the 6th–7th they relieved and evacuated Bab bou Andar; and almost daily missions followed from the 9th to the 22nd. On that date they evacuated the garrison of Oued Amzou, and after a day's running battle stood off a night attack on their camp, launching a successful counter-attack outside the perimeter. On 4 June they re-occupied the abandoned post at Astar, fighting their way in and holding it to cover the evacuation of nearby Sker, before fighting their way out again on the 5th under heavy machine gun fire.

On the night of 10–11 June Cdt. Cazaban called for volunteers to break through and evacuate a desperate garrison at the airfield of Mediouna. It is recorded that men quarrelled over places in the rescue party, rejected soldiers slipping into the ranks under cover of darkness.



Machine gun platoon, CMA/4e REI, Fom el Hassan, 1937 (see Plate G3). This hard-bitten crew show wide variation in the shades of their uniforms and cap covers. (Courtesy Charles Milassin)



Part of 2e Peloton, VI/1er REC, the Legion's first motorised squadron, raised in 1929 at Colomb Bechar. It patrolled from Taghit in 1932; fought in the Djebel Sarro in February 1933; and in 1934 both V and VI Escadrons Motorisées took part in the occupation of Tindouf. In October 1934 the VI/ was disbanded; the V/1er REC remained at Tata. Equipment was very mixed – Renault and Citroën reconnaissance cars, a few White-Laffly armoured cars, troop-carrying, tanker and signals trucks, etc. – but about 15 of these Berliet VUDB 4 x 4 armoured patrol cars formed the backbone, each with a crew of three and a mounted FM24/29 LMG. With a 40hp engine the 4-ton car was grossly under-powered, and the chassis too weak for the weight of the armour. (SIHLE)

Light platoon, CMA/4e REI, Fom el Hassan, mid-1930s; camouflage finish is French Army green and sand. This is the troop-carrying conversion of the Panhard AMD 165/175 TOE armoured car, with turret removed and a Hotchkiss mounted beside the driver. Motorised Mounted Companies had 280 all ranks, with a command and services platoon, a 120-strong lorried infantry element, and light and heavy armoured platoons with turretless and turreted Panhards. Mounted Companies took to their primitive, uncomfortable armoured cars with great reluctance; they were less mobile, more fragile and more demanding than mules. (Courtesy Charles Milassin)

It seems that they fought their way in through two lines of trenches, and started back with the garrison's survivors before being overwhelmed; the bodies of the four officers and 60 men were never found.

In 1926 a massive Franco-Spanish effort (including eight Legion battalions from the 1er, 2e, 3e and 4e REIs) brought final victory in the Rif, and Abd el Krim surrendered to the French that May. By this time Marshal Pétain had 300,000 men in the field, and French Army dead – not officially admitted for 20 years – totalled at least 12,000.

The French turned immediately to the final reduction of the Atlas ranges. In June 1926 the whole 3e REI fought on the outlying Tichouki massif, defeating the Ait Mohand and Ait Seghrushin. They were joined by the I/ and VI/1er and I/ and II/4e for the July operation, which captured the main ranges. Successive advances in 1927–29 were not without cost; the II/3e REI took significant casualties defending El Bordj and Ait Yakoub in June 1929, the CM/1er in an ambush at Djihani that October, the 1ère CM/2e against the Ait Hammou at Tarda-Tadighoust in August 1930, and the 2e REI at Tazigzaoust while advancing on the Plateau des Lacs in September 1932.

In the southern desert the stubborn Tafilalt was finally pacified. Early in 1933 infantry, cavalry and the Mounted Companies of the 1er, 2e and 3e REI saw hard fighting in the Djebel Sarhro, heartland of the Ait Atta Berbers, who had dominated the south for centuries; and the 2e and 4e were strongly represented in operations that summer which forced the chief Ouskounti and his last warriors to finally submit at Mt. Baddou. The pacification of Morocco was completed by a final push through the Anti-Atlas far to the south-west in early 1934.

Cavalry, armour and artillery

Despite some misgivings over the increased opportunities for desertion which were offered by putting légionnaires on horses, the 1er Régiment Étranger de Cavalerie started forming at Sousse, Tunisia, in 1921. The



The Mounted Companies

The lineage of these units is confused by mergers, inter-regimental transfers and many changes of title. All the following references are from various articles in *Képi Blanc*.

1913 14e CM/2e RE became autonomous Compagnie Montée d'Algérie. Jan. 1922 CM d'A attached to 1er REI, took over lineage of all CMs in the Sud Oranais since 1881. July 1931 2e CM/2e REI became new Cie. Motorisée. 1er REI retired Feb 1933 Cie. Automobile. 1er REI based Bou Denib, later Tabelbaia. 1934-39. CM d'A based Khenchela. Jan. 1939 CM d'A became Cie. Portée/1er REI.

1913 3e CM/2e RE became autonomous Compagnie Montée du Maroc. Nov. 1920 CM du M became 1ère CM/3e RE. Jan. 1922 1ère CM/3e REI became CM du M attached to 2e RE. Oct. 1923 CM du M became 1ère CM/2e REI; new 2e CM/2e REI formed. Jan. 1930 2e CM/2e REI at Oujda received first vehicles. Oct. 1930-July 1931 2e CM/2e REI became Cie Motorisée. 1er REI 1ère CM/2e REI became CM/2e RE. 1934-37 CM/2e REI based Kzar es Souk. Oct. 1940 CM/2e REI became 12e Cie Mixte Montée/3e RE.

Nov. 1920 2e CM/1er REI became 2e CM/3e REI, based Goultrama. Jan. 1922 2e CM/3e REI became CM/3e RE. 1933-40 based Erfoud. Nov. 1940 CM/3e REI became 8e Cie Mixte Montée/3e RE.

Sept. 1920 1ère CM/1er REI became CM/4e REI, based Bou Denib. April 1933 CM/4e REI became CM Automobile/4e REI. May 1934 CMA/4e REI built and occupied post at Fourn e Hassan. Nov. 1940 CMA/4e REI became 12e Cie. Mixte Montée/2e REI.

Légionnaires probably of the 2e REI serving an M1897 75mm gun in Morocco, 1932-34; they wear M1914 khaki drill uniforms, brown three-pouch equipment and slung M1892/16 carbines. In May 1932 the 2e formed a four-gun, 80-man Batterie de Marche d'Artillerie at El Hajeb. The battery wore red-backed collar patches until 1935, later replaced by a scarlet diamond with blue grenade and double blue piping to the upper edges, worn on the left sleeve. Another battery formed the same month at Ouarzazate by the 4e REI supposedly wore a sleeve patch from the start. Both units fought throughout the later Moroccan campaigns. Redesignated Batteries Portées, both were attached to the 4e REI from late 1939, soon forming a third. All three were dispersed along the Moroccan coast from November 1940, affiliated to the 2e REI until April 1943, then to the 3e until disbanded in February 1944.

1er REC had many former White Russian cavalrymen, some serving in ranks far more humble than they had achieved in the Tsar's service.

During the Rif crisis the III/1er REC fought in the Tache de Taza: the I/ and II/ were reduced to cadre, men being transferred to reinforce the 1er REI. The regiment's first major mounted service was the IV/1er REC's tour in Syria in 1925. The III/1er moved south to Bou Denib in 1926 and saw some brisk clashes during escorts and patrols. The other squadrons rotated through the southern station in succeeding years; and the 1er REC was active in the final penetration campaigns of the early 1930s. In 1929 the regiment formed 6th and later 5th Motorised Squadrons, with reconnaissance cars, trucks and a few armoured cars.

In January 1930 the first few trucks were delivered to the 2e Compagnie Montée/2e REI at Oujda. This began a gradual process of motorisation which by 1934 would see mixed truck/armoured car units taking over the role of the old mule companies in patrolling the southern wilderness. The 2e CM/2e REI was redesignated Motorised (later, Automobile) Company/1er REI. In January 1932 it saw action

against a war party led by one Belkacem at Mecissi; and in February 1933 its CO Lt. Brenklé and 11 men were killed at Bou Gafer in the Djebel Sarhro (the same battle which cost the life of the famous *Homme Rouge*, Capt. Henri de Bournazel of the Spahis). With improving equipment and practice the armoured and motorised cavalry and mounted units took part in all the main operations of the later Moroccan pacification period.



Sidi bel Abbès, 2 March 1940:
1er REI veteran among the draft
leaving for France to form the
II/13e DB de Marche. He wears
the M1926 helmet, M1920
greatcoat, and leather equipment
with 1934 modifications; the
chèche and medals give a
properly dashing air – the Legion
has always been concerned to
appear to best advantage in front
of lesser troops. (ECPA)



Legion units usually operated in Morocco in all arms columns including Colonial artillery, but an 80mm mountain-gun section formed in May 1925 by the 1er REI saw action on the Oued Guir and Oued Zoussana. In 1931 it moved to the High Atlas, particularly distinguishing itself on the Oued Imedrhas on 22 July 1933, and seeing action that August at Mt. Baddou. In October 1934 it became the MG Company of III/1er REI.

In May 1932 both the 2e and 4e REIs formed 75mm gun batteries which saw action in the later Moroccan campaigns; early in World War II further Saharan batteries were formed, as was a full battalion by the 6e REI in Syria.



Syria

After 1918 former Turkish possessions in Syria and Lebanon passed under French mandate. The IV/4e REI landed at Beirut in March 1921 as part of the new garrison, followed in August by the V/4e and later by the IV/1er REC. French rule was fiercely resented by the warlike Druze tribes of the inland hills; but for the first three years French columns and posts were not seriously attacked, and the IV/4e REI was disbanded in November 1924. In July 1925 a major rising broke out in the Djebel Druze.

On 22 July Capt. Normand's company of the V/4e suffered 115 casualties to an attack on Kafer south-east of Soueida, the main base in the southern Djebel Druze. Soueida was cut off, and a relief column was thrown back with heavy loss on 2-3 August. The rising spread; meanwhile a second relief column set off for Soueida, led by the V/4e REI (Cdt. Kratzert) and IV/1er REC (Capt. Landriau), plus a cavalry armoured car squadron. Warned when he reached the old walled village of Mousseifré on 16 September that some 3,000 Druze were approaching, Kratzert set his légionnaires to strengthening the perimeter for defence; unknown to them, many rebels were already inside the village.

A pre-dawn probe on the northern wall was beaten off, but first light on the 17th brought heavy attacks from all sides. The infiltrators opened fire from the rooftops, ambushed légionnaires in the alleys as they ran to the perimeter, and butchered most of the REC's tethered horses. Eventually improving light enabled the armoured car gunners to clear

France, 1939-40: equipment issue. The recruits, above, wear M1930 képis and darkish blue denim fatigues; at right foreground note M1918 khaki bonnet de police, and the brown fall-collar M1936 jersey. (ECPA)

the roofs. Successive attacks were beaten off during the morning; the afternoon brought French air support, and the Druze withdrew leaving some 500 dead. Legion casualties were 47 dead and 83 wounded.

The other major Legion action was the defence of Rachaya by the IV/1er REC and a squadron from the 12e Spahis on 20–24 November 1925. Another old, labyrinthine stone village, Rachaya offered no clearly defined perimeter; during three days and nights of attacks the Druze often penetrated parts of the defences, leading to desperate hand-to-hand fighting. Landriau's troopers were down to their last few rounds and preparing to 'do a Camerone' when, on the 24th, aircraft and the 6e Spahis came to the rescue. The Legion squadron lost 58 dead and wounded.

The Druze revolt petered out, and successive Legion battalions had a relatively quiet life in garrison. In October 1939 those currently in the Levant – I/, IV/ and VI/1er REI and II/2e REI – were amalgamated into the new 6e RFL.

Indochina

The Legion garrison was reduced during and withdrawn immediately after World War I. In 1920 the IV/1er REI returned; in 1921 the IV/2e, redesignated IX/1er in 1926; in 1927 the VII/1er; and in 1930 the I/1er. In September 1930 the last three battalions were amalgamated into the new 5e REI. Apart from occasional expeditions against 'pirates' (bandits), and the brief but bloody Communist-led rising in Yen Bay province in 1930, life for the Legion in Indochina was peaceful. It was regarded as a luxury posting for men with good records; pay and allowances were generous, hard physical work was infrequent, and charming female company was plentiful.

CAMPAIGNS 1940–42

13e DBLE officer in the trenches at Bir Hakeim. In the battle of May–June 1942 the Free French Brigade repulsed repeated heavy attacks by Rommel's 90th Light and Italian Ariete Divisions supported by air raids, and the Bren carriers of the III/13e spearheaded the successful break-out on the night of 10–11 June; the regiment suffered about 30 per cent casualties in all. Identified by a veteran as a 'Cdt. Babonneau' (possibly Cdt. Bablon, who took command after El Alamein), this major wears an M1931 officer's képi and British battledress with gold-on-khaki collar patches and gold-on-black rank slides. (The French commandant is the rank equivalent to major, but when appointed to command of a battalion he is styled *chef de bataillon*.)





The start of the 13e DBLE's long journey: Gen. de Gaulle inspects a guard of honour in Whitehall, London, in July 1940. The légionnaires wear M1926 and M1915 helmets, the shirt and 'golf' trousers of the French Army M1938 uniform, brown mountain boots and white-over-khaki double socks. The chèche and blue sash are the only Legion touches.

new units that were committed to combat against the Axis. As with World War I, space allows only brief notes here on campaigns well documented in standard histories.

Narvik

March 1940, 1st French Light Div. (Gen. Béthouart) shipped to Norway included 13e Demi-Brigade de la Legion Etrangere (Lt Col. Magrin-Vernerey – 'Monclar'), a two-battalion unit raised from African garrisons, trained and equipped in France for mountain warfare. Landed Haafjeldet peninsula 6 May; attacked German troops successfully at Bjervik, 13 May, and Narvik, 28 May; 2e Cie. lost all officers and 60 men; Germans pushed back to Swedish frontier.

Division withdrawn at news of German *blitzkrieg* in France, intended to reinforce Rennes, Brittany; arrived Brest too late; 13e DBLE re-embarked with full equipment for UK. 30 June, unit addressed by Gen. de Gaulle, then almost unknown Free French leader. About half of 13e opted for repatriation to Morocco, remainder to fight on with British. (Free French unit briefly redesignated 14e DBLE, resuming number 13e in November 1940.)

The Battle of France

Units raised in Metropolitan France included 11e REI (November 1939

2,500 volunteers from Legion garrisons, plus 500 French reservists with former Legion service); and 12e REI (February 1940 – mostly ex-legionnaire French reservists plus 400 new volunteers). Units reasonably well equipped, mostly with pre-1935 material. 1e and 2e REC provided 673 all ranks for **Groupe de Reconnaissance**

75mm crew of the Batterie Saharienne Portée, probably at Ouargla, Algeria, where it was formed in October 1940; a 2e BSPL was formed at Fort Flatters in April 1941. They wear M1930 képis and khaki greatcoats with full-cut *serouel* desert trousers in khaki drill, and the traditional red-brown leather bandolier equipment of Saharan units. The BSPLs fought with the Allies in southern Tunisia in winter 1942–43, disbanding in December 1943.

In January 1941 the 8e REI formed a **Groupe Autonome d'Artillerie du Levant**, with three four-gun 75mm batteries; personnel wore red-backed collar patches. They fought courageously against the Allies in June 1941, suffering some 25 per cent casualties. The 13e DBLE took over four of their guns and used them against enemy armour at Bir Hakeim, transporting them *en portée* on Ford 3-ton trucks.



Divisionnaire 97 (February 1940 ~ one mounted, one lorried infantry, one fire support squadron, with motorcycle element)

About 6,000 new volunteers were accepted 'for the duration', most serving with **21e** and **22e Régiments de Marche de Volontaires Étrangers** (October 1939) and **23e RMVE** (May 1940); many Spanish Civil War refugees recruited at grim Bacarès internment camp in the Pyrenees, and many Eastern Europeans. At first neglected, the RMVEs received better clothing in April 1940. (Although adequately armed, equipment was uneven – 22e RMVE was nicknamed 'the string regiment', as almost complete lack of equipment straps forced men to improvise all slings from cord.)

11e REI (Col. Robert) with 6th (N. African) Div. when German offensive opened 10 May 1940; moved to Stenav between R. Meuse and R. Chiers; 27 May, holding Bois d'Inor when enemy arrived. Held out under repeated attacks until ordered to retreat 11 June; 18 June,



Damascus, summer 1941:
an officer of the 13e is decorated
by Gen. Catroux. Note British
khaki drill clothing now issued;
and contrast between officer's
M1931 and soldier's M1930 képi
proportions. (Imperial War
Museum)

1: Legionnaire, Bn. C, 2e RM/2e RE; France, Oct. 1914

2: Lt. Col., 4e RM/1er RE; France, Nov. 1914

3: Porte-*fanion*, Bn. C, 2e RM/1er RE; France, June 1915





1: Invalid, 4e RM/1er RE; Lyons, spring 1915
 2. Caporal, RMLE; Western Front, early 1916
 3 LMG team No.2, RMLE; assault order, Aug. 1917

1: Légionnaire, III/RMA, Dardanelles, spring 1915
2: Caporal, 2e CM/1er RE; Morocco, Aug. 1918
3: Sergent, RMLE; Lorraine, Nov. 1918



- 1- Légionnaire, VI/1er REI; Morocco, June 1925
2. Légionnaire 1ère cl., V/4e REI; Syria, Sept. 1925
3: Brigadier, IV/1er REC; Syria, Nov. 1925



1: Capitaine, 1er REC, Morocco, c.1930

2: Sergeant, CM/3e REI; Morocco, early 1930s

3: Capt. Prince Aage, II/3e REI, Morocco, early 1930s



- 1 Bugler, III/2e REI; Meknès, summer 1934
- 2 Drummer, 3e REI; Fez, summer 1932
- 3: Caporal, 5e REI, Hanoi, c.1937





1: Légionnaire, 13e DBLE; Norway, May 1940
2: Légionnaire 1ère cl., 12e REI, France, June 1940
3: Légionnaire, CMA/4e REI; Morocco, 1937-41

- 1: Sergent, 13e DBLE; Rome, June 1944
2: Adjudant, 1er REC; Germany, April 1945
3: Section leader, RMLE, Alsace, Jan. 1945



North Africa, 1943-44: the 1er REC parade in their new American armour – an M8 Howitzer Motor Carriage (75mm turret on Stuart tank chassis) of the fire support element, and M8 Greyhound armoured cars. The HMC has a green Legion grenade painted on to the 5e DB sign on the side of the engine. (ECPA)



encircled at Saint-Germain-sur-Meuse; II/11e virtually wiped out. Pulled back towards Toul, 11e REI had taken 70 per cent casualties by cease-fire on 22 June.

12e REI (Col. Besson) with 8th Div. in Soissons sector when first attacked 6 June. Counter-attacking, III/12e wiped out in ten hours; remainder of regiment encircled by nightfall on 7th; c.500 men managed to break out; c.300 still with 12e near Limoges at armistice of 22 June.

GRDI 97 (Lt. Col. Lacombe de la Tour) was recce element of 7th (N. African) Div.; fighting on Somme south of Péronne on 18 May and thereafter in stubborn retreat until 22 June, this unit distinguished itself in half a dozen costly defensive battles against heavy odds. The colonel died among the rearguard covering the crossings of the Oise, and only 262 all ranks survived at the armistice.

21e RMVE (Lt. Col. Debuissy) heavily attacked on 9-10 June at Buzancy-le-Mort-Homme and La-Grange-au-Bois in Ardennes; saw no further action.

22e RMVE (Lt. Col. Villiers-Mor) made vigorous counter-attack at Villiers-Carhonnell near Péronne on 24 May; took, lost and retook village, but eventually overrun by German tanks after impressive resistance.

23e RMVE (Lt. Col. Aumoitte) managed to delay German armour for two days at Pont-sur-Yonne south of Soissons on 15-16 June.

The 13e Demi-Brigade, 1941-42

The fall of France condemned the 13e to a lonely exile as the only Legion unit among the Fighting French, but in the process they won unique prestige.

After the snows of Norway their next fight alongside the British was among the baking rocks of Italian Eritrea in East Africa. The 13e landed at Port Sudan on 15 February; they captured Engihahat on 27 March, entering Keren the next day and taking Montecullo on 7 April. In these actions and the subsequent capture of Massawa the 13e took more than 15,000 prisoners.

There now followed a tragic episode when légionnaire fought légionnaire. On 8 June 1941, alongside British and Australian forces, the

13e DBLE crossed the frontier from British-held Jordan into Syria, which was held by French troops loyal to Vichy – including the 6e REI. Both units fought with courage, discipline and decency, and losses were significant. The armistice of Saint-Jean-d'Acre ended hostilities on 14 July; the 6e were allowed to choose repatriation or enlistment, and about 1,000 joined the 13e DBLE, which formed a third battalion. The rest returned eventually to North Africa, most reinforcing the depleted 1er REI.

Commanded from August 1941 by the Georgian prince Lt. Col. Amilakvari, the 13e DBLE moved to Egypt late in 1941 to serve under the British 8th Army; they represented half the infantry strength of Gen. Koenig's 1st Free French Brigade. The II/ and III/13e greatly distinguished themselves in the epic defence of Bir Hakeim (27 May–10 June 1942) at the southern end of the Gazala Line defences; this battle was a defining moment for the Free French cause.

During the El Alamein fighting in late October 1942 the 13e was committed to a costly attack at El Hmeimat on the British left flank; Col. Amilakvari was among the fallen. Lt. Col. Bablon led the 13e during Montgomery's pursuit to Tunisia; the 1st Free French Brigade was upgraded to divisional status (1ère DFL) while the 13e were resting at Tobruk.

CAMPAIGNS 1943–45

Tunisia

Since the fall of France the garrisons in Vichy-governed North Africa had been starved of recruits and equipment, and subjected to periodic harassment by German authorities trying to repatriate their nationals and hunt down anti-Reich elements in the Legion's ranks. There were some ugly episodes involving 'duration only' recruits; and up to 2,000 German légionnaires were forcibly removed, many later serving under Rommel in the Wehrmacht's *Inf. Rgt. Afrika (mot)* 361. Before long, however, the Legion became adept at posting vulnerable men to far-flung garrisons before the inspectors arrived.

The 1er REI had remained in Algeria, the 1er REC in Tunisia, the 2e and 3e REI in Morocco. The 2e REC and 4e REI (minus its Automobile Company) had been disbanded in 1940, the 6e REI in 1941; but a new 4e DBLE was raised in August 1941 and shipped to Senegal in French West Africa, far from prying German eyes.

After some brief resistance the Anglo-American landings in French North Africa in November 1942 allowed l'Armée d'Afrique to join the Allies in time for the campaign in Tunisia. From December various field forces – handicapped by their old-fashioned weapons and transport – were hurriedly thrown into action against the still-formidable *Panzerarmee Afrika*. All three battalions of the so-called 3e REI de Marche suffered very heavy losses (and, briefly, the cherished regimental colour) on the Djebel Mansour in mid-January 1943; a small motorised force from the 1er REC did well at Fomm el Gouafel. In April the 2e REI was disbanded, its remaining effectives joining the 3e. The 1er REI de Marche (from the I/1er REI and 4e DBLE) fought at Pont du Fahs and Zaghuan in May 1943. Meanwhile the 13e DBLE, coming up the coast from Libya, fought at Djebel Garci on 11–12 May.

Men of the 13e DBLE and one of the non-European units of Koenig's Free French Brigade at the Well of the Dog – Bir Hakeim, Libya, early spring 1942. French képis, field equipment and weapons were used with complete British clothing issue. Note the M1914 Hotchkiss MG carried in the 3-tonner; the heart indicates 1st Company. (IWM)



Reorganisation, 1943–44

Victory in North Africa allowed the reorganisation and wholesale re-equipment of the French garrison with US material, to take part in the Allied liberation of Europe the following year. This exercise transformed the Legion for the first time into a modern fighting force. The main unit was the three-battalion RMLE, reviving the title of 1915–18 and formed from the former 2e, 3e, 4e and 6e REIs at Sidi bel Abbès in July 1943. Destined to provide the armoured infantry of the new 5th Armoured Division (5e DB), it was organised, equipped and trained along US lines. The 1er REC, with an HQ squadron, a light tank squadron and four armoured car squadrons, was the divisional reconnaissance regiment. The 13e DBLE also enjoyed a rest, retraining and re-equipping with US matériel. There was some mutual wariness between the 13e and the ex-Vichy units.

Italy and North-West Europe

The 13e DBLE (Cdt. de Saligné) landed in Italy in late April 1944, taking part in the forcing of the Garigliano and fighting at Monte Pencilio before bypassing Rome. The 1/13e won a small but brilliant battle at Radicofani on 18 June, climbing a rocky hill under heavy fire from a German company dug into the old castle on the summit with artillery and tank support.

The 1ère DFL (later renamed 1ère DIM, 1st Motorised Infantry Division) was soon withdrawn and committed to the Allied landings in southern France; the 13e DBLE disembarked near Saint-Tropez in mid-August 1944. The 5e DB also landed in Provence in mid-September. The initial advance justified the nickname 'Champagne Campaign'; but all three Legion regiments saw very hard fighting in winter 1944–45 in Alsace. The 13e fought around Strasbourg and Colmar, and in the last weeks of the war in the Alps around Isola.



Beards were worn in the field by many men of the 13e; this splendid légionnaire at Bir Hakelm is identified as an NCO by his uncovered midnight blue and red képi with a gold grenade badge, and gold chevrons on shoulder strap slides. Before cropping the photo showed that he still carried the M1892/16 carbine. (IWM)

The squadrons of the REC (Col. Miquel) and the battalions of the RMLE (Col. Tritschler) – divided between US-style Combat Commands grouping half-track infantry, tanks and artillery – were heavily engaged in the Vosges throughout November. In January and early February they saw bitter fighting in the snow-bound Colmar Pocket, assaulting stubborn German positions in one village after another.

Col. Tritschler died of sickness; Col. Olié led the RMLE into Germany on 19 March, and in a raging advance all the way to Austria. They crossed the Rhine on 2 April, the Neckar at Tübingen on the 19th, reached Stuttgart on the 21st, the Danube at Tuttlingen on the 23rd, and the Arlberg Mountains in the Tyrol by 1 May.

Indochina

The main European units in garrison were the 9e and 11e Régiments d'Infanterie Coloniale and the three-battalion 5e REI. In September 1940 the II/5e saw action when Japan launched a surprise attack on French posts around Lang Son close to the Chinese border; but a treaty soon obliged the French colonial authorities to co-operate with Japan. The I/ and III/5e saw action when, with Japanese encouragement, Thailand attacked the western borders of the colony between September 1940 and January 1941. Japanese troops and airfields were installed in Indochina, and the lightly equipped French garrisons, though left in place, were limited to operations against bandit gangs.

In March 1945 Japan demanded the disarming and internment of all French troops. The refusal of this ultimatum triggered simultaneous attacks on most French posts on 5 March; hundreds were killed in their defence or massacred after capture. Luckily the three field battalions of the 5e REI were on column up country around Tong Phu Tho on the Red River: under command of Gen. Alessandri these and other refugees made an epic fighting retreat of 800 km through jungle and mountains, crossing the Chinese frontier to safety after 52 days.

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THE PLATES

Note: These plates and commentaries correct, where possible, errors in our book *French Foreign Legion Uniforms 1831–1981* (Blandford Press, 1981).

Throughout, the term 'khaki' has its European meaning of drab mid-brown as used for wool uniforms (US equivalent 'olive drab', French *moutarde*); the British term 'khaki drill' means lightweight cotton uniforms in pale sandy shades (US equivalent 'khaki' or 'suntan', French *khaki claire* or *khaki sable*).

Pattern dates, e.g. M1920, refer to the authorising order or first official description, usually predating actual issue by months in wartime or years in peacetime while previous stocks were used up. Later modifications were often ordered without changes of designation, so in any particular case different sources may attach different dates: e.g., the khaki drill tunic equivalent to the M1920 wool version is usually termed the M1921, although neither appeared in numbers before c.1927, but the half-breeches – changed only in details from those ordered in 1914 and issued in 1915 – are termed in one important French source 'M1915/27'. The point of this obscured explanation is to warn readers that absolutely rigid pattern/date identifications are rare. They should also remember that soldiers often disobey official regulations, either through failures to issue the official pattern items or through simple defiance.

A1: Légionnaire de 2e classe; Bataillon C, 2e Régiment de Marche/2e Régiment Étranger; Mailly-le-Camp, October 1914

Volunteers were outfitted from French Metropolitan stores exactly like Line infantry, though with a red cloth grenade for the front of the M1884 képi, and the Legion's blue sash for wear over the greatcoat on parade. In field order, with the M1912 képi cover in *bleue-mécanicien* ('workman's blue') only the red collar numbers on the M1877 greatcoat in *gris de fer bleute* identified the unit. Red M1897 trousers were worn with M1893 boots and M1913 garters, belt and braces supported three M1888 cartridge pouches, one central at the back, and the frogged bayonet, the M1892 haversack (*etui musette*) and one-litre 1877 water bottle were worn slung – the African veterans brought their field equipment from Algeria, so had two-litre *bidons*. The black leather M1893 knapsack was initially stowed only with spare boots in a bag, M1852 mess-tin (angled back to allow prone firing), and one of the squad's tools and cooking utensils. The rifle was the 8mm bolt-action M1888/93 Lebel with eight-round magazine. (From a photo of the American volunteer and later air ace Kiffin Yates Rockwell, courtesy Paul A. Rockwell.)

BELOW RMLE recruits receive rifle instruction behind the lines. A date of 1916 is suggested by the mixture of clothing worn: the light colour here is horizon blue, the darker shade mustard-khaki. Note both képis (second from left shows the M1914 shape well) and bonnets de police worn indiscriminately.





A2: Lieutenant-colonel, 4e Régiment de Marche/1er Régiment Étranger; Mailly-le-Camp, November 1914

The red and black képi is the so-called Saumur style - there was also a shorter, more rigidly cylindrical 'Polo' shape. The lace rank stripes are in infantry sequence (gold/ silver/ gold/ silver/ gold), above the Legion's grenade in gold. The Norfolk-style field jacket, which officers were ordered on 8 October 1913 to acquire, is in one of the tolerated shades of blue-iron grey', supposed to match the troops' greatcoats; the collar bears the Legion officer's large gold-embroidered grenades, and the sleeves full-size rank *galons*. The red *culotte* with 45mm black seam stripes were worn with either these laced garters and ankle boots (with spurs for mounted field officers), or dark blue or blue-grey puttees. (From a photo of Lt Col. Peppino Garibaldi; regulation sword belt, M1892 revolver holster, and Galilée military binoculars are reconstructed.)

A3: Légionnaire de 1ère classe, porte-fanion; Bataillon C, 2e Régiment de Marche/1er Régiment Étranger; Artois, June 1915

The French Army ordered 'horizon blue' uniform in December 1914, but the quantities required meant that the Legion did not start receiving it until June 1915. The greatcoat had priority; this is the M1914, single-breasted with two breast pockets; note that rolled shoulder straps (for keeping equipment straps in place, and sometimes worn on the right only) were not a way of matching cloth. Yellow collar patches

LEFT Reconstruction of an RMLE légionnaire, 1916, with original items: khaki-painted M1915 Adrian helmet, light khaki stock, khaki M1915 greatcoat with green collar insignia, the Legion's 4.2m blue sash worn outside the coat for parade, brown leather equipment, M1893/14 grey-green canvas knapsack with heavy stowage, Croix de Guerre lanyard and personal medals. See Plate B2. (Courtesy François Vauvillier)

were ordered in December 1914, with green distinctions for the Legion, but as the yellow was ordered changed to horizon blue in April 1915 the Legion probably never wore them. Rank and trade badges were ordered in green for the Legion from May 1915, and forearm ranking was reduced to 35mm diagonals. The simplified M1914 képi is made of an imported cloth called 'English blue-grey'. Since late 1914 the red trousers were covered by *salopettes en toile bleue-mécanicien*. Puttees were made from anything available. Rolled blankets, tent section, pegs, cord, etc. had now been added to the knapsack; the M1879 spade is one of the squad-issue tools and utensils divided between the men.

In this unit national companies and even national flags were tolerated; after one was made for a Polish company by the ladies of Bayonne the Czech volunteers asked the mayor for one of their own—it survived the war, and is illustrated after E. Fort in *Le Passepoil* (although we have reconstructed a different uniform for the bearer for this date). There is evidence for a Swiss company *fanion* carried with the RMLE as late as April 1918.

B1: Invalid, 4e Régiment de Marche/1er Régiment Étranger; military hospital, Lyons, spring 1915

This convalescent's Legion sash is the only wholly regulation item worn. He has added an Italian cockade, and an unexplained pom-pom, to the M1884 képi. The barracks dress veste is virtually unchanged since the 1860s, but instead of regimental numbers he wears red collar grenades. In 1915–16 much clothing in non-regulation fabrics – e.g. brown or grey corduroy and 'moleskin' – was issued throughout the Army; these grey corduroy *culottes* are confined by puttees of old greatcoat cloth. Note the (unexplained) brassard edged with the Italian colours and bearing a misspelt ARGONE, in reference to the sector where this regiment fought the previous winter. (Published by Boisselier in *Le Passepoil*.)

B2: Caporal, Régiment de Marche de la Légion Étrangère; marching order, Western Front, early 1916

The M1915 helmet was issued in time for the Champagne offensive of September 1915, painted in general issue horizon blue. A khaki uniform for the units of the Army of Africa had been prescribed in the December 1914 orders, arriving with the RMLE piecemeal from January 1916, greatcoats came first, and it was several months before the RMLE were completely in khaki with repainted helmets. Headgear, ordered in May 1915, was officially a plain khaki M1914-style képi; but the troops preferred the khaki *bonnet de police*. A new cut of greatcoat was described in October 1915: double-breasted, without breast pockets, but with a deep fall collar. No specific collar cypher was ordered for the RMLE and at first 1er and 2e RE veterans kept their respective numbers, but before long '1' became standard (the RMLE had taken over the regimental colour of the 2e RM/1er RE). Until early 1917 the



ABOVE Portrait autographed in 1923 by a sous-lieutenant of the 1er REI, who still wears the double lanyard of the wartime RMLE on his khaki service dress tunic; the demi-Saxe collar bears gold grenades on gold-piped khaki patches. Infuriatingly, the inscription is only partly legible; it suggests that this officer is an English former Royal Navy lieutenant-commander. (Courtesy R.G.Harris)

patches remained this rectangular shape, thereafter they became lozenge-shaped to match the collar points. This old soldier has personal awards of the Croix de Guerre and a pre-war Médaille Coloniale.

M1914 modification brown leather belt, pouches and braces were now appearing; the M2 gasmask is carried in a rectangular tin. The M1914 canvas version of the M1893 knapsack has the usual heavy stowage, including here the blankets rolled in a personally acquired black rubberised groundsheet. The rifle is an early 8mm Berthier M1907/15, loaded with three round charger clips. (After reconstruction using original items by Laurent Mirouze & François Vauvillier.)

B3: 1er pourvoyeur, CSRG light machine gun team, RMLE; assault order, Verdun-Cumières, August 1917

By mid-1916 the introduction of the M1915 CSRG (Chalchat) light machine gun – although unreliable and inaccurate – helped transform infantry tactics. The rifle company's four platoons now each had support from the 'walking fire' of one, later two LMGs moving into the assault with them. By mid-1917 the LMG section had a corporal, three rifle-grenadiers, and a three-man fire team: *tireur* (gunner), *premier pourvoyeur* (first ammo number), and *deuxième pourvoyeur*. Officially the first ammo number carried eight magazines in a special knapsack and four in a special haversack: this soldier has dumped the heavy, awkward knapsack as soon as it was empty. The gunner and first ammo number each carried a .32 Ruby semi-automatic pistol and magazines in an enlarged cartridge pouch on the back of the belt. From October 1917 the platoon had two LMG/rifle-grenadier sections, one hand grenade section and one rifle section.

In warm weather men went into action in the M1914 tunic – single-breasted, with rounded stand collar, five front buttons, two rear vents, plain shoulders, and internal or visible skirt pockets with rectangular flaps. The small green chevrons on the left sleeve were introduced in April 1916 to mark service at the front: the first 'sardine' for 12 months and one for each six months thereafter – sometimes they were also worn on the upper right sleeve to denote wounds. The December 1914 order had specified yellow seam piping on the *culottes*, but this was not always present.

A 'lightened' assault order was in use by June 1915, the knapsack being replaced by a tent cloth roll. The addition of a second haversack and second water bottle to carry necessities for a day or two of unsupported fighting; two M2 gas masks (one in the ready position, one in a tin box); tools like an M1909 folding pick/shovel; extra ammunition and grenades, and sandbags for consolidating the objective – all this still made a heavy load for even strong men to lug across No Man's Land under fire. (Reconstruction from photos of original items.)

C1: Légionnaire, III Bataillon, 1er Régiment de Marche d'Afrique; Dardanelles, April/May 1915

The Legion battalion seems (from a photo published with a memoir by Gen. Jean Regnault) to have ended with the M1886 colonial helmet with its separate khaki cover: the paler khaki ventilator being removed and replaced through the cloth, the képi with pale khaki cover was also carried. The M1877 greatcoat bore red regimental numbers of the 1er or 2e RE: this veteran of Morocco also has a marksman's red buglehorn badge on his left sleeve. Other clothing was khaki



ABOVE The white *bourgeron* fatigue blouse and matching trousers dating from 1882, worn here with the blue sash by No. 2388 Légionnaire de 1ère classe Robert Lincoln, a Londoner who served with the 2e REI from 1930 to 1935. (Courtesy Jim Worden)

drill; later photos show the uniform worn by Plate D2, but it is unlikely to have been available by the unit's embarkation in March 1915, and the M1901 Colonial outfit was probably issued. By spring 1916 the unit wore the same as the RMLE in France. In a battlefield emergency this man is carrying one of the battalion machine gun company's M1914 Hotchkiss guns.

C2: Caporal, 2e Compagnie Montée, 1er Régiment Étranger; Gaouz, Morocco, 9 August 1918

The *Livre d'Or* (1931) mentions that Vivien Bessier rifle-grenades were used in this action. A bullet round projected these from a discharger cup fixed to the muzzle of the Lebel,

and tripped a five-second fuse. This corporal has snatched a discharger rifle and haversack of VBs from a fallen man, his own M1892/16 carbine – an increasingly popular alternative in the CMs – is slung. The Mounted Companies wore a variety of clothing, but normal field dress at this time was either the M1901 Colonial khaki drill tunic and straight trousers or the old white fatigue blouse and trousers; the M1877 greatcoat, and either the covered M1884 képi or the M1886 colonial helmet. In this reconstruction we follow group photos since c.1910, showing junior NCOs wearing the M1901 Colonial tunic (with buttoned-on ranking) with the white trousers when their men were in complete white fatigues. In the field the stand collar, with patches removed, was worn folded open.

C3: Sergent, Régiment de Marche de la Légion Étrangère; Château-Salins, 17 November 1918

Six days after the Armistice the RMLE made a ceremonial entry as liberators into this town in Lorraine. This sergeant (a composite reconstructed from photos, drawings and surviving items) has just come off duty; his field equipment was not worn on parade and he has swapped his khaki-painted helmet for the *bonnet de police*. For parade he wears his *ceinture de tradition* over the M1915 greatcoat; note his single gold rank stripe and the four green chevrons marking

BELOW Trooper of the 1er REC, late 1920s to early 1930s, wearing khaki drill M1921 uniform with khaki *bonnet de police* and green insignia on khaki wool backing; his left sleeve bears a marksman's crossed rifles badge.





ABOVE 1er REC on mounted parade in winter, Sousse, Tunisia, early 1930s. Note red-badged M1930 troops' and taller, silver-badged M1920 SOCs' képis worn uncovered. On the M1920 tunic REC rankers wore dark blue collar patches with a green 'I' over a green grenade. NCOs wore a larger silver grenade only – note men at left and third left; they also have silver chinstraps worn up and second, silver-bordered black straps worn down when mounted. The *maréchal des logis chef*, left, has three silver cuff chevrons of 'scooped' M1931 shape. (Courtesy R.G.Harris)

two and a half years at the front. His personal awards are the Médaille Militaire and a Croix de Guerre with two citations. Buttoned across his chest in parade position is a double *fourragère* or collective unit citation lanyard, in the ribbon colours of the Légion d'Honneur and Croix de Guerre. The system was instituted in April 1916. Two citations in Army orders brought the Croix de Guerre lanyard (the RMLE had three before its formation on 11 Nov. 1915); the fourth, one in the colours of the Médaille Militaire (RMLE, 27 Aug. 1916), the sixth, the red Légion d'Honneur lanyard (RMLE, 20 Sept 1917); and the ninth, the double lanyard illustrated (RMLE, 10 Oct. 1918).

Infantry rankers' uniforms c.1918–27:

Until the late 1920s uniforms were so motley that general regulations can hardly be quoted. The French Army faced an economic crisis; the European war had forced major changes in Legion uniforms, yet the bulk of the corps was now returning to North Africa; and recruits were flooding to join the Legion at a time when pre-war uniform stocks were low. While a commission discussed future uniforms the Army was ordered to use up wartime stocks. Units and individuals were outfitted on an *ad hoc* basis, and many local practices evolved. From published documentary and photo research (particularly by Guyader) we may generalise as follows:

Headgear

The képi, universal throughout the Army in 1914, had been replaced as the rankers' headgear by the *bonnet de police*



ABOVE Morocco, early 1930s: posed group of 3e REI légionnaires wearing white cap covers, M1920 khaki wool uniforms and the regimental double *fourragère*. (Courtesy John Neal)



ABOVE Ksar es Souk, Morocco, March 1935: the white regimental walking-out dress of the 3e REI (see Plate F2). It is worn here by, left, No. 3254 Lég. de 1ère cl. Albert Neal, and his comrade Cyril Conway; they enlisted together at Marseilles in February 1931. Neal won the Croix de Guerre TOE in March 1935, and was promoted sergeant shortly before his discharge in May 1936. (Courtesy John Neal)

Red and blue M1884 képis, with pale khaki covers for field dress only, had been retained in Africa but were now in short supply; many rankers wore only the khaki *bonnet de police* until at least 1923 (sometimes even with a neck flap tucked under the back when in the field), or the M1886 colonial helmet. Legion colour parties, honour guards, etc., received képis of various types – M1884, M1914 khaki or horizon blue – achieving uniformity by now adding the pale khaki cover for all orders of dress. In practice this was almost invariably breached white – the first use of the *képi blanc* for other than field dress.

In about 1923 large stocks of M1914 khaki képis arrived in Morocco, and the (non-regulation) use of the whitened cover soon became almost universal. Since the Legion was the only French corps whose rankers were still wearing képis, this was the foundation of the Legion's specific, exclusive association with the white cap.

In June 1926 the repeated appeals of its senior officers brought the Legion a new midnight blue and red kepi, the soft crown slightly higher at the back than the front, without side ventilators, with a 20mm cut out red grenade badge, and a two piece cover and neck flap issued in unbleached cotton

(though the flap was hardly ever used). Late in 1927 a second pattern was ordered: this was more cylindrical with a flat crown, the blue band now two-thirds of the total height. This is usually termed the 'M1930' in reference to a confirmation of these changes published on 9 April 1930. In April 1932 the grenade badge was enlarged to 30mm.

Cold weather uniforms

The M1914 mustard khaki tunic and half breeches were used alongside large stocks of surplus US Army olive drab M1912 and M1918 uniforms. Both displayed green-on-khaki collar patches and sleeve insignia; full-size 90-degree rank chevrons replaced wartime diagonals in 1920–21. The M1868 green and red fringed *epaulettes de tradition* were retained only by the *tête de colonne* of the 1er REI, and the blue sash was also rarely seen; even Legion buttons were usually replaced by plain half-ball types for most of the 1920s. The khaki greatcoat was the all-seasons field dress – either M1915, or M1920 (with belt loops both sides and two-button skirt pocket flaps) – usually worn over a blouse or undershirt.

Hot weather uniforms

For fatigues the M1882 white *bourgeron* blouse and trousers were still issued, and often seen with the blue sash. There were two main khaki drill uniforms. The M1901 Colonial

BELOW The use of metal breast badges began unofficially, at unit expense; the earliest Legion example was supposedly that of the 3e REI, said to have originated in Morocco in 1926 (see Plate E3). Silver apart from the red-painted centre of the bomb, it resembles a death's-head made up of the Legion grenade, the regiment's double lanyard, and a salamander; the motto is *Legio Patria Nostra*: 'The Legion is Our Fatherland'.



pattern had six front buttons, square stand collar, patch skirt pockets with or without rectangular flaps, and shoulder straps; its original straight slacks were now recut as half breeches. There was also a light drill version of the December 1914 mustard-khaki uniform (see Plate D2), as worn in the Dardanelles and Macedonia, some photos seem to show this with shoulder straps

D1: Légionnaire, VI Bataillon, 1er Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; Rif campaign, Morocco, June 1925

A composite reconstruction; though we choose to place him in the Bataillon Cazaban this légionnaire could stand for any of the Rif War units. His M1914 khaki or horizon blue képi has an unbleached cover (*coiffe écru*); against the chill of night he wears his M1920 greatcoat over M1901 Colonial khaki drill uniform. By the Rif War infantry on operations replaced the knapsack with the *barda* – their blankets and spare clothing rolled in the tent section. His rifle is a late Berthier M1906/15 with straight bolt and a needle-bayonet without quillons; this took five-round clips. After the Great War hand grenades were used enthusiastically in the Legion's Moroccan and Syrian battles; this soldier flings F1 fragmentation grenades during a dawn break-out charge. This battalion was awarded the red-flecked pale blue *fourragère* of the Croix de Guerre TOE ('for external theatres of operations', introduced July 1925) for actions during this campaign

D2: Légionnaire de 1ère classe, V Bataillon, 4e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; Mousseifré, Syria, September 1925

The troops sent to the Levant wore the M1886 colonial he met, with or without the separate cover; and the khaki drill version of the M1914 uniform with the usual regimental patches for stand collars. His greatcoat is rolled in his *barda*, which has the mess-tin strapped high on the back. This battalion was awarded the *fourragère* of the Croix de Guerre TOE for the action of 17 September. (After Guyader.)

D3: Brigadier, IV Escadron, 1er Régiment Étranger de Cavalerie; Rachaya, Syria, November 1925

The REC wore various uniform items in 1922–1939 (see Guyader, *Uniformes* no. 45 and *Képi Blanc* nos. 454 & 455), but during the Druze rising their field dress was apparently as illustrated for this corporal. The M1886 helmet was issued but unpopular; the khaki M1918 *bonnet de police* was preferred. Cold weather tunics were either surplus US Army olive drab (illustrated) or French M1914 mustard-khaki; khaki wool Chasseur d'Afrique breeches with dark blue seam piping were worn with M1916 three-buckle garters and M1917 boots fitted with spurs. Hot weather mounted dress was the M1901 Colonial tunic or, for fatigues, the white M1882 blouse, both worn with the khaki wool breeches. Collar patches were blue with green pipings and regimental number. In the field the loose linen *gandourah* (mentioned in orders of September 1923) was often worn over the uniform, with ranking on a buttoned chest tab. Leather equipment was standard, with the frogged bayonet for the M1892/16 carbine. At this date képis were seldom seen; by about 1927 they were more common, complete with cover and neck flap. A pale khaki *chèche* or desert scarf became popular, worn in various ways at the commander's whim – either looped round the neck, crossed on the chest, or wrapped all round the head and neck *à la Tcherkess*



ABOVE Sgt. Charles Milassin of the CMA/4e REI wearing khaki drill walking-out dress at Tindouf, Moroccan Sahara, December 1939. Note the career NCO's képi and four-pocket tunic worn open over a white shirt and black tie, with double gold chevrons hooked to the forearms. (Courtesy Charles Milassin)

The squadron consisted of a command and services platoon, and two sabre platoons each divided into two groups, each of two squads. One squad were scouts, one man carrying a VB grenade discharger; the other squad served an LMG carried on a packhorse. The 4th Squadron had been cited for its behaviour at Mousseifré in September, and a second citation brought the Croix de Guerre TOE *fourragère* for its desperate defence of Rachaya on 20–23 November. (Composite reconstructed from notes and surviving items, after Guyader)

Infantry rankers' uniforms c.1927–39

Although a new uniform was ordered in July 1920, with a detailed recapitulation in September 1923, it was about 1927

before deliveries allowed the beginnings of uniformity. M1920 cold and M1921 hot weather tunics were cut the same in khaki wool and pale khaki drill respectively, the latter having all insignia detachable for laundering. Both had loose-cut fall collars with rounded points, seven front buttons, skirt pockets with rectangular flaps, and an upward-buttoning belt loop on the left side (wool tunics often had brass belt hooks let into the seams instead). They were worn with wool or khaki drill *pantalon-culotte* basically unchanged since 1915, puttees, and M1917 boots. The wool uniform came from the manufacturers in various darker or lighter, yellower, redder or greener khaki shades—to the fury of commanding officers. Lozenge-shaped, green-piped collar patches bore green regimental numbers, sometimes (particularly in the 3e and 4e REI) above a small disc in blue, red, yellow or green indicating I to IV Bataillons respectively; a green grenade instead of the number was worn by the central depot at Sidi bel Abbès. From c.1925 the blue sash became more common again for parade and walking-out, but hardly ever for operations; in most units (except the 3e REI) the tunic was tucked into the half-breeches and the sash wound round on top.

NCOs' uniforms.

Sen or NCO ranks were *sergent*, *sergent-fourmer* and *sergent-major* until 1928; thereafter, only *sergent* and *sergent-chef*



ABOVE Walking-out dress, 1er REI, late 1930s; oddly, the soldier at left has breast pockets although not apparently a career NCO. The veteran at right sports the Médaille Militaire, two campaign medals and three service chevrons on his M1921 khaki drill; note tunic skirts tucked inside the half-breeches under the sash.



ABOVE 4e REI, Morocco, 1938: a 1ère classe wearing M1921 khaki drill shaving a mate wearing the khaki greatcoat. Under magnification the latter reveals green piping at cuff tops and each side of the epaulette loops, and a battalion-colour spot under the collar patch number.

The Army had two categories of senior NCO, but the Legion only one: career NCOs (until 1928, SOR, *sous-officiers rangagés*; thereafter, SOC, *sous-officiers de carrière*). Insignia were, before 1928, respectively one 90-degree chevron of 8mm button-colour lace above the cuff, one chevron plus a diagonal on the upper sleeve; and two chevrons. After 1928 the *sergent* wore two 55-degree chevrons, the *sergent-chef* three.

After 1921 these ranks were authorised a special uniform resembling that of officers and *adjudants*; the seven-button tunic had four pockets and a stand collar. In time it became fashionable for SOC to have stand-and-fall *demi-Saxe* collars; from the mid-1930s these were sometimes worn open over a collar and tie. Straight slacks were worn for walking-out, *pantalon-culotte* with puttees when on duty. For remarks on the SOR/SOC képi see under Plate E2 below.

E1: Capitaine, 1er Régiment Étranger de Cavalerie; Morocco, c.1930

In the field officers often wore the *gandourah*; this personal example, with added pockets and green braiding, survives in the Legion Uniform Museum. Rank was worn on a chest tab and the hanging end of the *chèche* was often slipped behind this and/or the belt. On operations the képi often had a pale khaki cover, with insignia exposed by a hole cut in the front; motoring goggles were also popular with all ranks. This M1919 officer's képi, with its characteristic 'pushed up from inside' look, has silver cavalry lace. The officer's M1921 stand-collar tunic in light khaki cotton has (hidden here)



ABOVE 12e CMM/2e REI (formerly CMA/4e REI), Foug el Hassan, December 1941; part of a group wearing the khaki drill tenue d'exercice d'été – (see under Plate G3). (Courtesy Charles Milassin)

midnight blue patches with silver grenades and green pipings. Pale twill riding breeches are worn with Chantilly-type boots; the M1918 officer's belt supports the M1876/93 holster for the regulation M1892 revolver, and a mapcase; a binocular case could be slung or worn on the belt. In the field both officers and men carried the straight 1822/83 light cavalry sabre under the left saddle flap. (Reconstruction from surviving items – see Guyader.)

E2: Sergent with company flag, Compagnie Montée, 3e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; south-east Morocco, early 1930s

From 1920 this taller, stiffer képi was the Army-wide headgear of the SOR/SOC – see above. It was midnight blue with a red crown, one 3mm royal blue piping round the top, a 20mm button-colour grenade badge and a 10mm button-colour lace chinstrap (a 1933 order adding a 2mm button-colour piping beneath the royal blue strip seems not to have applied in the Legion). Normally it was worn uncovered as an NCOs' distinction; but the subject photo shows non-regulation white covers on both troops' and NCOs' képis in this unit.

The M1915 greatcoat is worn over the half-breeches of the M1921 khaki drill uniform. Abandoned since 1905, 90-degree service chevrons on the upper left sleeve were reintroduced uniquely for the Legion by an order of September 1929, in green for privates and corporals and button-colour for senior NCOs; one marked six years' service, two 11 years, and three 16 years. Note two 55-degree rank chevrons, regimental collar patches, and 3e REI double *fourragère* with *tour de bras*.

His men wear puttees and black boots; this mounted NCO has acquired leather gaiters (non-regulation for his rank); the SOC's officer-style belt supports his holstered Ruby automatic. The *chèche* is worn crossed by everyone in the subject photo.

Legion units 'forming corps', i.e. independently deployed battalions and some companies, had their own *fanions*,

normally in various green and red designs incorporating the gold seven-flame grenade. This company bore the lineage of the old 2e CM/1er RE; the flag was awarded a Croix de Guerre with palm for the action at Gaouz in August 1918, and a Croix de Guerre TOE for another at Tasfert on 14 July 1927 – note both medals pinned slantwise to the tricolour canton. (Composite from photo and surviving flag, Guyader & Képi Blanc 355)

E3: Capitaine Prince Aage of Denmark, II Bataillon, 3e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; service dress, Fez, Morocco, early 1930s

A legendary figure, Prince Aage of Denmark, Count of Rosenborg, was inspired as a boy by tales of the former Danish Royal Guard officer Lt. Selchauhansen, killed at El Mounar in 1903 with the 22e CM/2e RE. Prince Aage (pronounced Oo-weh) was commissioned *capitaine à titre étranger* into the 2e REI in December 1922; he served in Morocco for most of the rest of his life with the 2e and 3e. He was promoted *chef de bataillon* of the II/3e, aged 47, in March 1935; and died of pleurisy at Taza in February 1940. Upon Algerian independence in 1962 his body was moved from Sidi bel Abbès to lie – with those of Gen. Rollet, and Légionnaire Zimmermann (the last légionnaire killed in Algeria) – in the cemetery of the Legion's retirement home at Puylobier.

His service dress uniform (from a photo and surviving items) is conventional. The M1931 officer's képi was essentially the same rigid design worn today; officially the grenade had a regimental number in the 'bomb' from 1931. By 1935 the regulation khaki had become darker than the old 'mustard', and the long-pointed *collet à l'aiglon* was replacing the shorter *demi-Saxe*; the midnight blue patches bear the Legion infantry's two green pipings and regimentally numbered gold grenades; for field use the cuff rank stripes were replaced by short bars. The tunic, worn with pale *mastic* breeches and brown riding boots, displays the 3e REI's double *fourragère* and – pinned to it in the style of the period – the earliest known example of a Legion unit badge in metal, dated by Malcros to as early as 1928 (see photograph on page 42). Most of Prince Aage's ribbons were Danish and foreign orders awarded in compliment to his royal blood, but his Légion d'Honneur and Croix de Guerre TOE were earned the hard way.

F1: Clairon-trompette, III Bataillon, 2e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; summer parade dress, Meknès, 1934

The run-up to the corps' centenary in 1931 was used in many imaginative ways by Col. Rollet, commanding the 1er REI, to enhance the Legion's image. In November 1930 he got authorisation for the Legion – uniquely – to reintroduce for parade and walking-out the fringed epaulettes; from this date garments with shoulder straps had them replaced by transverse *brides* (retaining loops). Ceremonial was encouraged, and unit commanders introduced special uniforms for their *têtes de colonne*. For musicians handsome instrument banners were produced, in the red and green which the Legion was quietly making its 'traditional' colours (from the epaulettes). Designs varied, but all featured the grenade: a badge widely used for generations by many types of French troops, this, too, was soon to appear in a design special to the Legion – with seven flames, the outer pair horizontal or recurved.



ABOVE Benigni drawing of a soldier of the 5e REI in Indochina, 1938. This is the M1921 khaki drill with M1931 sun helmet, M1892/16 carbine and full marching pack. In theory this is the outfit worn on column; in practice soldiers in the exhausting heat and humidity of the Far East usually had coolies to carry their packs. (Livre d'Or)

The buglers of the 2e carried both a bugle and a trumpet. This soldier (after Benigni, and Guyader in *Képi Blanc* 378) wears M1930 képi and summer-weight M1921 uniform, its collar loose over a pale khaki stock. A single green service chevron is hooked to the left sleeve, and strips of musician's tricolour lace are sewn to the cuffs; only bandsmen wore a green lyre trade badge on the upper sleeve. The absence of even a first-class private's chevron during his second enlistment suggests that this légionnaire has had disciplinary problems. The battalion is identified on the grenade of the trumpet banner; and by the *fourragère* of the Croix de Guerre TOE, marking the III/2e REI's second citation for the battle of Djebel Iskritten in May 1926. The 2e and 3e REI heads of column used whitened leather equipment. He has a slung M1892/16 carbine.

F2: Tambour de 1ère classe, 3e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; summer parade dress, Fez, 1932

White walking-out dress was introduced in North Africa by the 1er, 3e and 4e REI in the early 1930s, and was also worn as summer parade dress by musicians. Details varied; the cut of this drummer's uniform generally resembles the M1905 Colonial troops' whites long worn in the Far East. Officially, from 1931 rank (but not service) chevrons were made from 12mm rather than 8mm wide braid, and were shaped *en fer de lance* – slightly 'scooped'; but these did not appear in numbers before 1933. Note the parade arrangement of the regiment's double *fourragère*. (After Guyader, *Képi Blanc* 482 & 483.)

BELOW Syria, May 1940: a corporal bugler in M1920 wool uniform with parade epaulettes and his battalion's Croix de Guerre TOE *fourragère* — note I/6e REI identification on the bugle banner (and cf. Plate F1). Just visible above the left cuff are two green diagonal rank braids above one of musician's tricolour lace. The cuff top is piped dark green; ordered in 1935 for tunics and greatcoats, this is seldom seen in photographs. (ECPA)





ABOVE **Sergent, 13e DBLE, Bir Hakeim, spring 1942.** The khaki wool beret of Fortress Troops, issued before Narvik, bears a numbered gold grenade cut from an officer's or adjutant's dark blue collar patch, and two diagonal gold rank bars; shoulder slide ranking is double gold chevrons. (IWM)

F3: Caporal, 5e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; walking-out dress, Hanoi, c.1937

In Indochina the Legion had long been permitted a white walking-out uniform of 1895 Colonial cut, and in the interwar years this evolved to match the style of the M1920/21 uniforms. One difference is the closer cut of the collar, without a visible stock or shirt and tie; in North Africa the collar of the M1920/21 uniforms was becoming progressively more open. Insignia are green on khaki; note the rank chevrons *en fer de lance*, and a green strip added to the white epaulette loops. The white M1931 colonial helmet has a large brass badge introduced in 1935 by Col. Despas. (Reconstruction from notes and photos, *Képi Blanc* nos. 453, 486 & 487.)

G1: Légionnaire, 13e Demi-Brigade de Marche de la Légion Étrangère; Narvik, May 1940

Various protective clothing and alpine equipment was distributed to the 13e for the Norwegian campaign, but not consistently. Less often illustrated than the sheepskin *canadienne*, the dark khaki M1935 *veste d'automitailleuse* or the dark khaki hooded pullover parka (*blouson avec capuchon*) was this reversible khaki/white *cagoule*, here with a black field recognition band added. These garments were all worn over the French Army's new M1938 khaki wool uniform. The canvas overtrousers (*salopettes* M1938) covering his 'pantalon golf', puttees and heavy white oversocks certainly reached some companies of the 13e; and snowshoes were standard issue. Tinted goggles were not; the Legion's legendary skill at scrounging no doubt provided these, as well as

the overboots, another scarce item. His helmet has an issue drawstring cover, and he wears a khaki wool toque and trigger-mittens. His equipment is old apart from the haversack for the ANP31 gasmask; the M1892/16 carbine rather than a MAS.36 rifle suggests a member of an MG platoon. (After photos, *Militaria* 20)

G2: Légionnaire de 1ère classe, 12e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; Soissons, June 1940

This North Africa veteran in standard French Army marching order belongs to the only wartime-raised Legion regiment which seems to have been issued the M1935/37 leather equipment and 7.5mm MAS.36 rifle. The 11e and 12e received the M1938 uniform in dark khaki wool, featuring a six-button tunic with a wide-cut fall collar exposing a pale khaki button-down shirt and tie; long, straight 'golfing trousers', and shorter puttees. The greatcoat is the M1920; officially the collar patches were supposed to be coverable by a small coat-cloth flap sewn along the outer collar edge and fastened across by a small button. The M1926 helmet is painted dark khaki. The *bonnet de police* was often decorated with non-regulation grenade badges, or even regimental numbers. The new haversack and water bottle are attached directly to the belt, and now in reversed positions; the MAS.36 needle bayonet was stowed under the barrel rather than in a frogged scabbard. The ANP31 gas-mask is slung beneath the pack, steadied by a web waist strap. (Composite, after Guyader, *Képi Blanc* 459, & Vauvillier, *Militaria* 20.)

G3: Légionnaire, Compagnie Montée Automobile, 4e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie; Fom el Hassan, southern Morocco, 1937-41

In 1935-38 the new khaki drill *tenu d'exercice d'été* reached Africa: a short-sleeved pullover shirt with open notched collar, shoulder straps and breast pockets, worn with shorts and long khaki socks or puttees. Arab sandals were popular in desert-based units. Here the shorts are worn with his old M1921 khaki drill tunic, the *chèche*, and a M1930 képi with a khaki cover in preference to the issue khaki drill M1931 Colonial helmet.



RIGHT **Légionnaire, Bir Hakeim, 1942: a good profile of the M1930 képi.** The collar patch on his British BD is a green cut-out grenade on khaki. (IWM)



LEFT Morocco 1944: Sgt. Charles Milassin, RMLE, poses for a portrait during the regiment's working-up phase, wearing the taller képi of the career NCO with a cut-out in its white cover to show the gold grenade. His US Army shirt and tie are set off by the regiment's double lanyard, and non-regulation pin-on brass chevrons. Milassin had been seriously wounded in Tunisia, and would be again in Alsace. (Courtesy Charles Milassin)

The M1892/16 carbine had increasingly replaced the Lebel and Berthier rifles as the standard personal weapon during the 1930s, at first in the Mounted Companies and later in several infantry units. This section light machine gunner carries instead the FM.24/29 in a canvas and leather protective cover; his left ammunition pouch is replaced by a holstered Ruby automatic. He is dressed for duty close to the fort; on patrol the water bottle, haversack and tentroll *barde* would be carried on the man or the truck. (Composite from photos courtesy the late Charles Milassin, & Benigni.)

The units that saw action in 1941–43 (the 6e REI in Syria/Lebanon, and the REIMs in Tunisia) wore pre-war uniforms: M1926 helmet, greatcoat, M1920 khaki wool or M1921 khaki drill tunic and half-breeches, M1935 shirt and shorts, with some late 1930s general issue items like a brown sweater with fall collar, khaki long-sleeved shirt with button-down collar, etc. Equipment and weapons were also of pre-war vintage.

H1: Sergent, 13e Demi-Brigade de la Légion Étrangère; Rome, June 1944

When the 13e DBLE exchanged British for US Army clothing in 1943 it proudly retained the regiment's khaki beret of Fortress Troops' pattern; here this bears the gold diagonal braids of his rank. US Army 'chino' shirt and slacks are worn with M1923 web rifle belt and M1938 leggings; the French Expeditionary Corps in Italy also made much use of US herringbone twill fatigue clothing. The standard weapon was the

US P17 rifle. For the parade to welcome Gen. de Gaulle to Rome on 28 June photos show colour party NCOs wearing this Cross of Lorraine sleeve patch, now the insignia of the 1ère Division Française Libre; and a *fourragère* in the red flecked with light green of the Croix de Guerre 1939–45. Separation from the central administration had not prevented the Free French forces awarding decorations and citations, and the 13e certainly wore this lanyard before being upgraded to that of the Médaille Militaire (of which this NCO wears a personal award).

H2: Adjudant, 1er Régiment Étranger de Cavalerie, 5e Division Blindée; southern Germany, April 1945

The crews of the 'Royal Foreigners' armoured cars and tanks were issued the US Army one-piece herringbone twill work suit, 'M1941' olive drab field jacket and standard web equipment (but not the tanker's windcheater jacket). While the US M1942 armoured crewman's helmet was standard issue photos also show a number of these French M1935 steel and leather motorised troops' pattern. Out-of-action headgear included some képis but also a variety of *bonnets de police*. Like many items acquired or improvised at unit level by légionnaires in 1943–45 these followed no rigid pattern. Surviving examples worn by the REC are in various shades of dark green with dark blue top folds or dark blue piping. This one (from the stores of the Vichy youth movement *Chantiers de Jeunesse*, which also provided the green neckties that the RMLE started to wear for parade and walking-out in 1945) is in emerald green with a blue-piped turn-up folded on the right front; our warrant officer has added at left front a silver grenade cut from an old collar patch. Sewing a complete collar patch to the left sleeve was typical of French troops of this date. A photo of the crew of one REC M8 in a quiet moment shows two white-covered képis, one *bonnet de police*, one French M1935 and one US M1 helmet. (After Guyader.)

H3: Section leader, Régiment de Marche de la Légion Étrangère, 5e Division Blindée; Alsace, January 1945

The RMLE were equipped as US armoured infantry of 1942–43: M1 helmet (note painted insignia of 5e DB in horizontal presentation, applied to both sides), 'M1941' field jacket, OD wool trousers, greatcoat and/or raincoat, web equipment and leggings. A surviving jacket has this Legion grenade left sleeve patch. In winter 1944–45 the unit was issued these US overshoes, which they packed with straw and tied around with knotted cord. The P17 remained standard, alongside the M1A1 Thompson, BAR, M1 carbine and M1911A1 pistol. The RMLE *bonnet de police* was green with a red top fold; when worn, the képi's white cover often had a circular hole at top centre, tightened with a drawstring, through which the red cloth of the crown was exposed. (After Guyader.)